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THE BURNT MILLION.

BY JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF 'BY PROXY,' ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOOD ADVICE.

It has been stated by a physician of experience that more persons are put out of the world without discovery in that square mile of which Belgrave Square is the centre than elsewhere in all England, the inhabitants of that region being peculiarly liable to temptation to that crime, from the system of primogeniture and other causes, and also too highly-placed to be troubled by the vulgar interference of a coroner's inquest. It should be some compensation to middle-class people living, for example, at Kensington to reflect that they cannot be cut off prematurely by their nearest relatives without some stir being made about it; and it may be taken for granted, since there was no inquest upon the body of Mr. Tremehere, that that gentleman needed none. It was understood, and very properly so, since nothing could be urged to the contrary, that he died of heart complaint, as the eminent doctor whom he had consulted had expected him to do. But though there was no debate as to the cause of his death there was talk enough about the deceased himself, and many an attractive 'par.' he made for the newspapers. It was not everybody, it appeared, who had known him that knew 'Josh' was a Hebrew, till his burial in the Jewish Cemetery at Kensal Green put that matter beyond question. He had certainly not been

ostentatious in professing the faith of his fathers, and no one except Mr. Allerton had any idea what a stickler he had been for it.

In the meantime, of course, his wealth was trebled. If you laid it down in sovereigns, as one ingenious reporter alleged, it would have reached from the Land's End to John o' Groat's; another, not to be outdone, added, 'edgeways.' Perpendicularly in a pile, it would, very nearly, have touched the moon. These calculations, so obviously exaggerated, and also differing so materially from one another, nevertheless delighted the public. They would stand in knots opposite the red brick house shading their eyes with their hands, and point out to one another the room—the curtained one with the window open—where the dead man lay with the lonely 'watcher' by his side, guarding, after the manner of his race, what needed no longer custody.

No departed greatness, whether of genius or virtue, could have excited one tenth of the interest that hung round the dead master of millions; but whither his millions had gone interested them vastly more than his own destination—which by most, indeed, was taken for granted. 'His worst he kept, his best he gave' could have been justly said of him, if not quite in the sense intended by the poet. Poor Josh! His name, like Cæsar's, a week ago could have stood against the world—or, more prosaically, had been 'good' for anything; and now it was a bye-word. Songs were made upon it, as Falstaff threatened to make upon his adversary, and sung in the streets, to popular airs: ignoble thoughts wedded to transitory melodies. Mr. Edward Roscoe, who had left Lebanon Lodge, and whom business made peripatetic, would sometimes involuntarily listen to them in quiet streets, not knowing whether to smile or to frown.

How *could* he know till the will had been read? There were so many things to be considered before he could look at the memory of his deceased friend in the proper light. Personally, he had disliked him exceedingly, and of late much more than ever; but he was not a man to be influenced by prejudice of that kind. He took much broader views. He knew from Mr. Allerton that Josh had left him what the lawyer evidently considered to be a large sum, but he might not be a good judge of size in that respect; Mr. Allerton disliked him—Mr. Roscoe looked matters of this kind in the face—and would have grudged him his legacy, whatever it was. Still, it was doubtless a considerable sum, for Josh had been

liberal, and even lavish on some occasions ; and this had been given him, as the lawyer had told him, for saving his life—unbuttoning his shirt-collar and giving him brandy on a certain momentous occasion.

This was a matter which Mr. Roscoe did not look in the face ; for particular reasons of his own, the contemplation of it was exceedingly distasteful to him. He kept his thoughts as much as possible fixed on the legacy itself. If it was really large, that, of course, would be so far satisfactory ; but, on the other hand, its very size was, from another point of view, to be deprecated. It might have been left to him, not out of gratitude alone, but as a species of compensation for the extinction of certain hopes which Mr. Tremenhère had, he knew, suspected him of entertaining. ‘ Here is your money,’ the testator seemed to be saying to him ; ‘ more than you expected, and ten times more than you deserved ; but I have taken care that you get nothing more out of me, or of my family ; your connection with them henceforth ceases, and is at an end for ever.’

Mr. Roscoe not only possessed a keen intelligence, but a knowledge which is falsely reported to be extremely rare—he knew himself, and even saw himself to some extent as others saw him : and he saw himself pretty much as Josh had seen him. This naturally gave him great uneasiness. He had long ago taken such measures as were possible to him to make him independent of the opinion of his deceased friend ; but strong, nay, extreme, measures as they had been, would they now prove sufficient ? This was the question he was constantly putting to himself during these days of doubt.

He would have given a hundred pounds for one glimpse of Mr. Joseph Tremenhère’s will (and if he could have read it, he would have given all he had in the world—including his legacy—to have burnt it) ; but there was nothing for it but patience. In the handsome lodgings he had taken for himself near his late employer’s residence, where he was treated with great consideration—for if he was not the rose, the dead millionaire himself, he had been near the rose, and was supposed to possess the very secret which he yearned to learn—he passed anxious hours, sleepless nights. He had been playing for high stakes ; he had a strong hand, and had played it with admirable dexterity, but he was by no means sure how the game had gone.

As to whither Mr. Joseph Tremenhère had gone, that inquiry never so much as occurred to him. It interested him not in the

least, which, considering the intimate relations that had so long existed between the two men, seems strange. And yet, how little thought do most of us give to the condition of those who have left us for ever, however close have been the ties that bound us to them when they were on earth; less, upon the whole, than if they had undertaken a long journey upon this planet, and concerning whom, leaning on our garden 'spud' in the summer weather, we wonder how they are getting on in New York or Melbourne. What Mr. Roscoe thought of was not Mr. Tremenhare but Mr. Tremenhare's money; and, with one exception, everybody else was thinking, though not with so interested an anxiety, just as Mr. Roscoe did.

Even the great and good Lord Morella, though he professed some apprehensions for the sinner who had been so suddenly summoned by that messenger who brooks no delay, was much more apprehensive respecting his family property, a large amount of which had, without doubt, stuck to the dead man's hands, and helped to swell that fortune in seven figures which was attracting the admiration of the public. Mr. Allerton's temporary interest in poor Josh had utterly died away, and was transferred to his property—a matter which occupied a good deal of his attention: notwithstanding its size, it was not unwieldy; it was, indeed, remarkably free from complications of any kind; it was the will itself that worried him. In his heart of hearts the lawyer felt that it was not only, as he had told his client, an unjust and improper will, but in point of law a doubtful one; nay, one which he would not have hesitated, if any other man had drawn it up, to call a bad will. It was liable to dispute, and on the face of it suggested dispute because of its manifest injustice. If his client had lived, Mr. Allerton was convinced, or flattered himself so, that he could have persuaded him to alter or tone down what was amiss in it. Even now, it was possible, should matters turn out favourably, if the legatees should prove amenable to reason, and not be got at by interested parties, that they themselves might eventually get things arranged to their satisfaction; but if there should be opposition at first, and an antagonistic spirit, not only might the will be set aside, but, what was much more to be deplored, all the safeguards by which poor Josh had hoped to protect his property from fortune-hunters and adventurers would be swept away.

Now, though Mr. Allerton disapproved of the will, he approved, though within less narrow limits, of the safeguards; the 'intention

of the testator' was sacred to him ; and, as so often happens in the case of the pious founder, the lawyer's object was to carry out the wishes of his client, while at the same time avoiding the evils which a hard and fast adhesion to them would infallibly bring about. If the three heiresses (if they could be called so) would allow themselves to be ruled by him, all might still go well, he hoped ; but if they were restive, or incited to antagonism by others, he foresaw trouble. He knew nothing of the influences that were at work with them, save one ; and that he profoundly distrusted. His rock ahead, for the present at least, he well perceived, was Mr. Edward Roscoe. That that gentleman was on intimate terms with the family was evident ; Miss Philippa had shown in his presence a total absence of self-restraint ; Miss Agnes had expressed her confidence in him, and strongly, almost passionately, resented that doubt of his delicacy of feeling which the lawyer had ventured to hint. That he was a designing scoundrel Mr. Allerton was assured—his character with respect to other matters forbade him to entertain a more charitable opinion ; conciliation, he felt, would be utterly thrown away upon him ; it would only, as it does in the mind of every scoundrel, suggest that he was an object of fear. But to show his distrust of him would be even more dangerous ; upon the whole, he concluded it would be best to treat him with apparent confidence. He was certainly a friend of the family, and, as it seemed, their only friend ; next to himself it was reasonable that they should look upon him as their adviser in matters of business. Mr. Allerton decided, therefore, to do him the compliment of asking him to hear the will read. He was not without hope that, from the manner in which Mr. Roscoe should listen to its provisions, he might gather his views on the matter, or even some hint of his future intentions. At all events, it would give that gentleman no material advantage. In a few weeks, at farthest, even if he did not receive the information at once from the ladies, which was almost certain to happen, he could read it all for a shilling at Doctors' Commons. Upon the whole, it seemed better to treat him as a friend. He therefore wrote to Mr. Roscoe, stating his intention to read the will to the three sisters, on a certain day, and inviting him, as an old and valued friend of the family, to be present at that ceremony.

The day appointed was not, as usual, that of the funeral, out of regard for the ladies, who, he thought, would be too 'upset' to attend to matters of business, but the day afterwards ; a decision

which he afterwards regretted. One at least out of the three objects of his solicitude was not so overcome by grief as not to be anxious (though not, perhaps, from mere mercenary motives) to know how her future had been arranged for her, and the delay was not favourable to Mr. Allerton's views. She inquired the reason of it of Mr. Roscoe, and that gentleman shrugged his shoulders. 'To wink with both our eyes,' the poet tells us, 'is easier than to think;' but to wink with one of them has an effect upon the observer equal, if not superior, in significance to speech itself; and a shrug of the shoulders is near akin to it. Mr. Roscoe's shrug spoke volumes.

'I suppose we may take it for granted,' observed Agnes—for it was she who was the questioner—'that Mr. Allerton is an honest man?'

The two were alone, so that it was doubtful whether the word 'we' referred to herself and her sisters, or to herself and her companion; he took it in the former sense, however.

'Well, Allerton is a lawyer,' he answered, smiling; 'but, honest or not, he can do nothing, one way or the other, as regards the disposition of your property; he can only be guided by the will. As to this delay, I think it very probable that he wishes by it to impress upon you the idea of his possessing a power which in fact he does not possess. He was your father's legal adviser—unfortunately or not it is impossible at present to say—but he is not yours. You are under no obligation to seek his counsel, or to take it if offered. You must be guided by circumstances.'

'You mean as to our attitude to Mr. Allerton?' she answered quickly.

Again her speech was equivocal: he had said 'you,' but she had said 'our' where 'my' would have seemed more appropriate; on the other hand, the word might have been used fitly enough in reference to herself and her sisters, and again he took it in that sense.

'Well, of course,' he answered curtly. 'It is very inconvenient for those in your position to be on bad terms with those in his; if it be possible, live peaceably with all men, is a precept to be especially followed in the case of one's trustees. If you take my advice, you will be very civil to Allerton. Whatever may be the information it is his duty to impart to you to-morrow, receive it with as little emotion as possible, however distasteful it may be to you.'

‘Distasteful! What *do* you mean, Edward?’

There was alarm in her tone, and something more; the vehemence of her feelings had even, no doubt unconsciously, caused her to address him by his Christian name. He took no advantage of that circumstance (which some persons—Mr. Allerton, for example—would have put down as an unexpected item to his credit) to adopt a more familiar tone. On the contrary, his manner was scrupulously grave and judicial. It was evident, however, that he was putting some restraint upon himself; and this was not unwelcome to her—she felt that it was being done for her sake.

‘I mean nothing,’ he said. ‘I have no cause even to suspect anything. But others may have suspected something.’

‘What! my father?’ she answered with a catch in her voice, as if someone had caught her by the throat.

‘For Heaven’s sake, command yourself,’ he exclaimed authoritatively, almost harshly. ‘Yes, it is possible that your father may have been too solicitous for what he foolishly imagined was your welfare, or jealous of another’s influence over you. For all we know, there may be restrictions.’

‘Restrictions? I don’t understand you,’ she murmured hoarsely.

‘Why should you? It will be time enough to talk of such things—and how to evade them—when we learn of their existence; I only wished to put you on your guard. Whatever happens to-morrow, keep a good heart, show a firm face. There may be nothing the matter. You think I am cruel, but I am only cruel to be kind, Agnes.’

He dropped the word, as it seemed, after a little hesitation.

‘You call me by my name, as if you were ashamed of it,’ she cried with sudden vehemence. Her face assumed a colour which was not becoming; her blue eyes glittered with passion.

‘Great Heaven, what a task is mine!’ exclaimed Mr. Roscoe bitterly. ‘Can you not understand that it is not shame but fear that makes me prudent? You have some suspicion of me in your mind, I know: what is it?’

‘I have none, or if I had it is gone,’ she answered hurriedly. ‘Forgive me, Edward.’

‘I have nothing to forgive,’ he said, in his gentlest tones; ‘but if you wish to please me, lay to heart what I have said about to-morrow.’

CHAPTER XV.

AN ENIGMA.

MR. ALLERTON was not without his apprehensions as he went up the stairs with the will in his pocket to the drawing-room of Lebanon Lodge. He was used, of course, to 'public readings' of a similar kind; but this was an exceptional occasion. He was used also to lady clients; and though tender-hearted, and of a gallant disposition, he much preferred those of the sterner sex. Ladies are more difficult to manage in matters of business than men. They are more ignorant but more opinionated; more liable to be deceived, yet more suspicious without cause.

In the present case what it was his duty to communicate he was well aware would not be agreeable. The three ladies were all left very well; they were immensely rich, but there were very severe conditions in restraint of marriage. There were, indeed, what are termed 'gifts over' to compensate for forfeiture in this respect—ten thousand pounds apiece was to be given to each upon her marriage, let her marry whom she might—but the rest of her money was left away from her unless her husband should be of the Hebrew persuasion. Moreover, this was left to the other sisters should they remain spinsters or be married to Jews. What was especially objectionable in the arrangement was, that it had been dictated, as Mr. Allerton very well knew, and the legatees must needs know still better, by no conscientious motive whatever, but for the purpose of keeping the testator's property intact, or in as few hands as possible. It was no tribute to Religion but to Mammon. No wonder, therefore, that the lawyer said to himself, 'How will they take it?' as he took his seat at the gilt and gorgeous table, so ludicrously inappropriate to his present use, and produced the all-important document. His audience he found already seated: Grace on the sofa, nearest to him, with Philippa's arm encircling her waist—as it struck him, in rather a stagey manner; Agnes on a chair apart, and Mr. Roscoe opposite them, on the other side of the room. The blinds were almost as closely drawn as though the house still held its departed dead, and it did not escape the lawyer's notice that the friend of the family had modestly placed himself where the gloom was deepest. The faces of all were pale, and, with the exception of that of Grace, wore an ill-concealed air

of anxiety. She had, as it afterwards appeared, expressed a wish that her presence might be spared; but this had been somewhat sharply overruled. She was old enough to understand what was to take place, she was told, and to suggest that her grief was too overwhelming to admit of her attending to her future interests was an affectation, and even a reflection upon her sisters. Philippa had volunteered to sit by her and comfort her; and she carried out her promise to the letter; every now and then she caressed her tenderly—even pitifully, as though she felt for her rather than for herself—when certain passages of the will were read, and concentrated her attention upon her almost exclusively. Grace did not return these endearments, but kept her quiet face fixed on Mr. Allerton. Agnes, too, regarded the lawyer with earnest solicitude, though at times she glanced furtively at Mr. Roscoe, who maintained an unmoved demeanour, with his chin resting on his hand.

A grim smile, however, curved his lip when Mr. Allerton read out the few words of exordium in which Joseph Tremenhare expressed his unalterable attachment to the faith of his fathers; perhaps he already guessed what was coming. Agnes looked serenely contemptuous, Philippa amazed, and even in Grace's face sat a wondering though tender surprise. Then came the restrictive clauses. Not a word was said, but they evidently produced a profound effect. Mr. Roscoe frowned and smiled—a combination which is seldom becoming, and it gave him a very ugly look. One must not say that a lady looks ugly, but Agnes in fact surpassed him in her expression of scornful disapproval; she even uttered an ejaculation of mingled disappointment and defiance. Philippa hid her face, which had become as pale as death, on Grace's shoulder; Grace alone remained unmoved: she seemed to listen to the bald and technical terms in which her father restricted the area of her matrimonial choice without understanding their meaning. The sense of them afterwards recurred to her, but she was, in fact, thinking of something else—not of the will but of the testator. Once, when her name was mentioned preceded by an affectionate epithet, the only one in the brief testament, the tears stole down her cheeks. The silence, though on the whole it was welcome to the reader, who certainly expected 'sensation' rather than 'applause,' oppressed the lawyer himself. It was almost a relief to him when, near the conclusion of the document, where it set forth on certain

contingencies the whole of the testator's enormous wealth was to revert to Robert Vernon, Mr. Roscoe inquired in his gentlest accents :

'Pray, sir, who *is* he?'

'Ah, who, indeed?' added Agnes bitterly.

Mr. Allerton gave the desired information, so far as he was possessed of it, and then concluded his task.

'It is an infamy!' observed Agnes, by way of commentary.

Mr. Roscoe lifted his finger; and though it was plain she had plenty to say, she said no more. Philippa kept her eyes upon the carpet and was dumb. Grace drew a deep breath of relief, because the business, for which she had had no taste, was over. The silence, broken only by the sounds in the street without, was embarrassing.

'I have now performed my mission, ladies,' said Mr. Allerton: 'if I can be of service in explaining any detail, pray command me.'

'The whole matter seems to me to require explanation,' said Agnes fiercely; and again Mr. Roscoe lifted his finger.

'Whatever may be thought of your father's distribution of his property—a subject which I must be excused from discussing,' observed the lawyer, 'the income which he places at the disposal of every one of you—in the case of those who are of age at their absolute disposal—is enormous; unless certain conditions are complied with, it is, indeed, but a life interest, but it is a fortune in itself. I have no control over it, but I hope the wish he has here expressed, that you will come to me for guidance and counsel, will not be disregarded; at all events my best advice will be always at your service.'

'You are most kind,' murmured Grace gratefully.

'As far as you are concerned, however, you are in my power, young lady, for some years to come,' observed the lawyer, smiling. 'If you had been listening to me, as you ought to have done, you would have understood that I was your guardian.'

'I am very glad that it is so,' she returned, with an answering smile.

Upon Mr. Roscoe's face the lawyer noticed there was the reverse of a smile. Was it possible he had flattered himself that Josh would have put him *in loco parentis* to his little Fairy? When his own legacy of 5,000*l.* had been mentioned, Mr. Roscoe had inclined his head as if in acknowledgment of that benefaction, but he had exhibited no emotion. His gratitude, if it

existed, had been perhaps swallowed up by the disappointment that the will had caused his lady friends. That he sympathised with them it was evident, though he had given no utterance to that emotion. His face was grave and dissatisfied, though not more so than if, moved by such a feeling, it might have been expected to be; but to Mr. Allerton, who did not for a moment credit him with anything of the kind, he seemed to be putting no little restraint upon himself, while at the same time he recommended patience and resignation to others.

As it seemed evident that no question was to be put to him, Mr. Allerton took his leave of the ladies, and was accompanied downstairs by Mr. Roscoe. As the lawyer reached the hall, 'One word,' said that gentleman, and led the way into his own room and closed the door.

'You have observed that it was not your intention, Mr. Allerton, to discuss with those ladies the document it has been your duty to read to them; but I hope that remark does not apply to others, who are in a better position, perhaps, to judge of the matter—myself, for instance?'

The speaker's tone was quiet, and his manner studiously respectful; but there was a tremor in his voice that belied them both.

'I am aware that I have no *locus standi*, in a legal sense,' he went on hurriedly; 'but I have some influence with your clients, and they will naturally look to me for an explanation.'

'Mr. Tremenhere's will explains itself, Mr. Roscoe,' replied the other coldly. 'You can scarcely expect a man in my position to give you his opinion on its merits.'

'Certainly not; there can, however, be only one opinion on the matter. You heard what Miss Agnes said; she called it an infamy!'

'I was very sorry to hear such an observation from her lips.'

'So was I; I endeavoured, as perhaps you observed, to restrain her; but you must admit that there was great provocation. The whole thing is preposterous. Such a will cannot hold water for a moment.'

Mr. Allerton smiled mechanically; no lawyer could have helped it. The idea of a thing not being defensible in law because it was 'preposterous'—and not 'for a moment,' too,—tickled him in spite of himself.

'I am not speaking on my own account, remember, Mr.

Allerton,' the other continued, with a sort of earnest indifference difficult to fathom; 'the affair is nothing to me. So far as I am concerned, as you justly hinted the other day, Mr. Tremenhere has "remembered me," as the phrase goes, very handsomely; but there are two ladies in whom I naturally feel some interest, and who will expect me to manifest it, placed in a most unfortunate position. They are both of a marriageable age.'

Mr. Allerton inclined his head. What was said of the elder sisters was certainly quite true—they had emerged from childhood. Miss Agnes, in particular, was by no means a chicken.

'I wonder,' thought Mr. Allerton, 'which of them this man has elected to marry! He would marry both of them—or at least their fortunes—if he could. At heart—if he had a heart—he is a Mormon. Of that I am convinced.'

'Well, these restraints upon their affections, whether they have set them on any particular object or not, must be most galling. I do not wish to speak upon the religious matter, because Mr. Tremenhere was your client. But his daughters, I am quite sure, do not sympathise with the idea their father professed to have in view at all. They are Jewesses only in name—that is the simple fact.'

'The majority of us are unfortunately Christians only in name,' put in Mr. Allerton dryly.

'No; the cases are not parallel. We wish, at least, to be thought Christians: these ladies do not wish to be thought Jewesses. I am speaking to you confidentially, of course, but I am speaking the truth. Under such circumstances, it is clear, these restraints must be set aside. You are concerned for the welfare of your clients, I am assured. Can there not be a friendly suit?'

'How can that be, when there are others who have a contingent interest in the matter—Mr. Vernon and his heirs?'

'The man is dead and has none—that is my belief.'

'That would simplify matters, of course; but Mr. Tremenhere certainly did not believe him to be dead three weeks ago.'

'Even so, there could be a compromise. The parties could all be brought into court together.'

'A very difficult operation indeed, believe me.'

'Still not an impossible one; since you have drawn the will you must appear to stand by it, of course; but you are a man of honour and good feeling, and you must see its injustice. Do you mean to tell me, if Miss Grace, for instance, should marry without

regard to these limitations, that you would not do your best for her ?'

'That is scarcely a fair question,' answered the lawyer gravely, almost sternly. He could hardly prevent the disfavour with which he regarded his interlocutor from appearing in his voice. He did not like to hear him speak of Grace, and especially in connection with such a subject. It seemed a sacrilege. Was this man only putting a supposititious case to him, he wondered, or was he hinting at some scheme of his own ?

'I would certainly do all I could to secure the happiness of Miss Grace,' continued Mr. Allerton, 'but that would be very little. It would be for the Court of Chancery to act in such a matter. They would have the will before them, and also the eligibility of the husband she had chosen. If you ask my private opinion, the latter consideration would, I think, weigh with a judge almost as much as the former.'

It was not an answer shot at a venture ; the speaker had aimed it with a particular object, and he saw that it had gone home. On Mr. Roscoe's impassive countenance there stole a cloud, not of disappointment, for he had probably expected some such reply, but of something very like despair ; it was not merely the corroboration of a fear, but the look of a suitor who hears a final judgment given against him. It struck Mr. Allerton very much, for he saw no sufficient reason for it. Here was a man full of audacity and resource apparently overwhelmed by the mere expression of his private opinion ; or, if it was even the statement of a fact, one that must surely have already occurred to him, if he had thought upon the subject ; and who could doubt that he had ?

'No doubt you are right,' said Mr. Roscoe after a long pause. 'Thank you. I will tell the ladies how the matter stands.' And so they parted.

Mr. Allerton felt that he had discharged an unpleasant duty in a manner even less satisfactory than he had expected ; had his news been received with even more antagonism he would have preferred it, if only those he had had to deal with had shown a little more of their hand. The difficulty of the situation lay at present in its obscurity ; the only thing he felt sure of was that in Mr. Roscoe he would find the key to it. But Mr. Roscoe himself was an enigma to him.

'My impression is,' said the lawyer to himself with a grim smile as he walked homeward, 'that that man will annoy Lord

Morella more than he has ever done yet, by decreasing our scanty successes in the conversion of the Jews; he will embrace the Hebrew persuasion himself, which will count for two on a division.'

CHAPTER XVI.

THE KEY OF IT.

As days rolled on Mr. Allerton was surprised, and perhaps as a lawyer a little disappointed, that Mr. Roscoe, or rather those over whom that gentleman had evidently so great a sway, gave him no trouble. That remark of his that the will would not hold water showed that he was conscious of its weakness, and any advice that he might have taken on the subject would probably have corroborated his opinion. If opposition was intended, there seemed no necessity for delay; but at present there was no sign of opposition. Mr. Allerton had seen the ladies more than once, and they had fallen in with all his arrangements as regarded business matters; no allusion to the will had been made at all. Miss Agnes had taken matters almost entirely on her own shoulders; 'whatever suits my sister will suit me,' Philippa had meekly said; but she had not looked meek. It struck the lawyer that they were not on good terms with one another, but had buried the hatchet while he was with them, as in the presence of a common enemy. And yet they did not treat him as an enemy. Agnes even sought his advice, and put various businesslike and pertinent questions to him, the source of which he was at no loss to discover. The two sisters were obviously acting under instructions. As to Grace, matters were very different. In the disposition of the vast income which Mr. Allerton held in trust for her, she at first not only took no interest, but the whole subject appeared to be distasteful to her.

'Do not let us talk of money,' she exclaimed pleadingly.

'But it is necessary,' he remonstrated, then added gaily: 'you will come to take the same interest in it—or in the spending of it at least—I do assure you, as in shopping.'

But there was no answering smile.

'To me, dear Mr. Allerton, money has been a curse.'

'What! already!'

'Yes, it has altered everybody about me for the worse; so changed them, indeed, that they are scarcely recognisable. Agnes

talks and, alas! I believe, thinks of nothing else. Poor papa is forgotten.'

'My dear child, you must not think that,' said the lawyer caressingly; 'you are too sensitive. Moreover, you must remember that your sisters were not to him what you were, nor he to them. *You* only were "his little Fairy."'

'I know, I know,' she sobbed; 'he loved me so; but he loved Agnes too, and Philippa. And to hear them speak of him as they do!'

'Surely not to you?' put in the lawyer indignantly.

'No, not to me. I am spared that. But to one another.'

'Perhaps there is some evil counsellor who sets them against him, who persuades——'

'No,' she interrupted quickly; 'to do Mr. Roscoe justice, that is not so. He restrains, and even reproves them. They are not so bitter as they were, I think, thanks to him.'

'That is so far well. You are right to do him justice, as we should do to all. You must remember, Grace, that not only did your father make a favourite of you, which was not judicious—though I cannot blame him, for I have fallen into the same error—but that the conditions under which he has bequeathed his property affect them to their disadvantage, which (at present at all events) is not your case. You must not be hard on them because they seem hard on him. I have seen so much of this. "The evil which men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones."'

'No, no,' she cried; 'his good is here,' and she touched her bosom.

'Yes: his memory is kept green in your faithful little heart,' he answered approvingly. 'Still, as I have said, we must be just. Your sisters have some cause for complaint—that is the fact. That feeling, however, will wear off. Things will settle down. You are going to the riverside, I hear, for a few days, and afterwards to Cumberland. That will be good for all of you, but it will prevent my seeing you perhaps for a long time to come. It is my duty to inform you how you are situated as regards your affairs. I hold in trust for you a very large income; but my hands are free. You will not want a tenth of it. The rest will accumulate—save what you wish to spend on any object dear to you. You have some cause at heart, perhaps, to benefit; some good purpose to serve.'

'To do some good! That would be a pleasure indeed!' she

exclaimed. 'I have never done any good. I know of no good cause. Pray help me.'

It was pitiful to hear her! Here was a girl generous, tender-hearted, full of good impulses, no doubt, with the means to indulge them to the full, but who had never done so, from sheer ignorance and lack of opportunity. The charities had never been cultivated at Lebanon Lodge. She was like some moral Laura Bridgeman, with all the wish in the world to improve herself, but the soil had run barren because untilled. For the moment, the lawyer was lost in the religious philanthropist; he saw in this girl, with her generous nature and vast income, an instrument ready to his hand for good. The vision vanished, however, like a breath. Duty with him, though it was by no means divorced from sentiment, was always in subjection to it; he had something of the zealot about him, but not his greed. Grace might do good with her income, for there was enough and to spare of it; but what he had in his mind was to save for the greater portion of it, so that when she came of age she should be in possession of a fortune which, however small compared with what should have been her share of her father's wealth, should make her independent of the conditions he had attached to its inheritance, and free to marry whom she chose. It was to the lawyer's credit that he was well aware in this case she could never have the husband he had in his mind for her. A few thousand pounds would be a mere drop in the ocean towards restoring the family fortunes of Lord Cheribert.

'I will do what I can,' said Mr. Allerton, smiling, 'to put you in the way of finding out for yourself that what you rail against is not an unmixed evil. Money is dross, it is said; but even dross—the very scum and refuse of things—may be turned to excellent use, just as out of the most offensive substances are extracted the sweetest scents?'

Grace shook her head: her face expressed disbelief, and even pain; it was evident that her mind was dwelling on some distressful reminiscence.

'Your father himself was fond of money,' said the lawyer gently.

'True; but for the good it enabled him to do with it,' she exclaimed, with eagerness. 'I thank you for reminding me of that. He never spoke of his good deeds even to me; but I remember once, when I was talking to him of his many friends, and how much he was sought after by persons of a rank far above our own, he said that it was his money which gave him the power to help them.'

"Every one can help the poor," he said, "my little Fairy; but these fine folks who are poor too, though in a different way, cannot be so easily assisted. I am the only man in the world, perhaps, that can keep their heads above water."

'That was true,' assented the lawyer, with a smile that for her had nothing of sarcasm.

'Of course it was true. Dear papa was the soul of truth. "I hope my little Fairy," he used to say, "will never, never tell a falsehood."'

The lawyer nodded again. What she had said was likely enough; 'Josh' used to aver, with a wiser man than he, though not so rich, that lying 'was a strain upon the memory.'

'And yet it is against a man like him—their own father—that Agnes and Philippa, just because he has left his money otherwise than they would have wished it— Don't let us talk of it; don't let us think of it, Mr. Allerton!' and she hid the face that was blushing for the shame of others.

'Still, as I have said, Grace, there is some excuse for them; they have wrongs which, though you share them, you do not understand at present.'

'And I trust I never shall,' she sobbed indignantly.

'I trust so, too,' he answered earnestly. 'Believe me, time will heal their disappointment, as it will your grief. Things will settle down. Your sisters' roof, remember, is your natural home. They are surely not unkind to you?'

He asked the question in some trepidation. It would be a great responsibility, as well as an immense inconvenience, to have this girl thrown on his own hands, to be compelled to find a home for her and a protectress.

'No, no,' she answered, much to his relief; 'they mean to be kind enough; and if they only knew how wretched they made me by what they say to one another—'

'That shall be stopped,' put in the lawyer confidently. 'There shall be no more of it; and when they cease to talk of their wrongs—which are not altogether fanciful, remember—they will cease to think of them; that is woman's way.'

Girl as she was, Grace could have put him right on that point; but she only inclined her head; the subject was distasteful to her.

'Is Mr. Roscoe in the house just now?' inquired the lawyer.

'I suppose so,' answered the girl indifferently. It was that

gentleman's custom, not only like Hamlet's father 'of an afternoon,' but in the morning, and also in the evening, to be at Lebanon Lodge; and she saw nothing strange in the frequency of his visits.

'Just so,' said the lawyer dryly; 'your sisters have many matters to arrange with him, no doubt.'

'Agnes has, of course: she naturally takes the lead, and he is her right hand as it were.'

'And Miss Philippa?'

'Philippa does not concern herself with affairs.'

'But she feels what you were telling me about this supposed injustice of your father's will as keenly?'

'Oh, yes; I think even more,' sighed Grace, 'if that were possible.'

'Well, well, that will soon be over, I promise you. In the mean time, as you seem a little lonely——'

'By my own choice,' put in the girl.

'I understand that. I shall send you a little friend to keep you company—a ward of mine.'

'Oh no, no strangers; at least not yet,' pleaded the girl pitifully.

'It's only a dog, my dear,' he answered, smiling. 'I have been left its trustee and executor under an old lady's will; and I am sure I shall find no kinder mistress for it than yourself. It is a well-conducted dog, though it answers to the name of Rip. And now good-bye. I want to have a word or two with Mr. Roscoe about business matters, and will look in upon him as I go out.'

The lawyer found Mr. Roscoe in his room, looking to the full as much at home there as he had done in his patron's time. He received his visitor stiffly, but courteously enough; his attitude seemed to be one of armed neutrality, ready for either peace or war.

'You have been interviewing Miss Grace, I suppose,' he said with a quiet smile.

'Yes. I find it rather hard to impress upon her the sense of her own position.'

'She is utterly ignorant of business.'

'That was, of course, to be looked for; but she exhibits a want of interest in her own affairs which is unusual even in a young lady. You will agree with me that, under the circumstances, there is some danger in that, as it will prevent her from understanding the motives of others, who may not be so disinterested.'

‘Quite so,’ returned Mr. Roscoe blandly, ‘and also their feelings. The latter consideration is of some consequence just now, and I am glad to have the opportunity of speaking to you upon the subject. It would, in my opinion, be better, for the present at least, that Miss Grace should be separated from her elder sisters.’

Mr. Allerton stared in amazement—not only did the proposition itself seem to him monstrous and unnatural, but it was also the last thing he expected the other to suggest. He knew that Roscoe must desire above all things to retain his influence over the whole family; and why he should propose that the youngest of them, and presumably the most plastic, should be withdrawn from his control was inexplicable to him. He had the worst opinion of the man; he regarded him as a respectable solicitor regards a distinctly shady one, and Mr. Roscoe had not even the excuse of belonging to the law.

‘You surely cannot be serious,’ he replied. ‘It would be a very grave step to take a girl of Miss Grace’s age from her natural protectors, and her own home. What on earth could justify such a course?’

‘Circumstances,’ returned Mr. Roscoe coolly. ‘Very peculiar circumstances, I admit, but they exist in her case. She does not get on well with her sisters. They are irritated—naturally irritated, as I venture to think—by the provisions of their father’s will; and, like most women, they are unable to control their tongues. She resents their observations on him exceedingly, and they resent her defence of him. Some day or another, I am afraid, they will reveal to her his real character, of which she is in a state of blissful ignorance; then she will have a very rude awakening from her Fool’s Paradise. That is a misfortune which, for her own sake, should if possible be avoided.’

Mr. Allerton thought so too; the contemplation of such a catastrophe, which he felt was only too likely to happen, alarmed him. It was impossible to surmise the effect of such a shock upon a delicate nature, already suffering from the keenest grief. On the other hand, he was convinced that it was no solicitude on Grace’s account that impelled this man to make the proposition. What could be his motive? He could not fathom it, but his very failure to do so convinced him that it was a deep one.

‘Such a revelation as you speak of, whether founded on fact or not,’ returned the lawyer, ‘would, indeed, be deplorable. I

cannot conceive a more wicked and cruel act. Nor, if it is really to be apprehended, how it is possible to be avoided. Grace has no other home to go to.'

Mr. Roscoe shrugged his shoulders and faintly smiled.

'We who are bachelors, Mr. Allerton, have much to learn as to the ways of women. It so happens, however, that I have had particular opportunities for studying the characters of the two ladies in question, and under feelings of strong irritation—I am speaking to you in confidence, of course—they are, in my judgment, capable of anything. As to avoiding such a contingency, it appears to me,' he continued in the same quiet tone, but flavoured with the least touch of sarcasm, 'in view of this weighty consideration, and also of the trust and confidence that the late Mr. Tremenhere evidently reposed in you as regarded this young lady, that you are the proper person to provide a home for her.'

'That is out of the question,' answered the lawyer firmly. 'If circumstances compelled her removal from her sisters' roof it would involve nothing less than a public scandal, since I should certainly seek for her the protection of the Court of Chancery. I could not have such a responsibility on my own shoulders upon any account. There would be some advantages in such a course, no doubt. She would be secure from adventurers; whereas, as at present situated, she must be more or less exposed to offers of marriage, an acceptance of any of which would, as you are well aware, be fatal to her material interests, though beneficial to those of her sisters. I'll think about it; but, on the whole, I am strongly of opinion that this danger is less serious than the moral and physical one involved in removing her from her own home and belongings and transplanting her elsewhere.'

'That consideration, I confess, has never occurred to me,' said Mr. Roscoe, biting his lips, 'nor did I imagine that you would be so unwilling to take personal charge of the young lady. Well, I can only say, then, for the present that I will do my best here to smooth matters.'

'Grace is already indebted to you, she informs me,' said Mr. Allerton graciously, 'for your good offices in that respect.'

'She is very good to say so,' returned Mr. Roscoe, but his face, as the other took his leave, bore anything but a look of satisfaction. Mr. Allerton felt that his difficulty had been surmounted, but without knowing how that object had been achieved;

he had checkmated his adversary, he was convinced, but by some move he did not himself understand.

‘The scoundrel was as much frightened at the notion of my applying to Chancery about the girl,’ said the lawyer to himself as he went his way, ‘as I was at the idea of taking charge of her. What scheme can he be devising? He did not like that prospect of a “public scandal,” I noticed. Of course he wants her to marry. Did he think that was more likely to happen if she left her home than if she remained, I wonder? My argument to the contrary seemed to move him. But there must be something else beyond all that. It seems contrary to reason that he should wish to get rid of her; yet he certainly did wish it till I threatened him with the Court. It cannot be that he feels himself equal to driving a pair but not the three, for he has pluck and perhaps skill enough to drive a dozen; why, therefore, should he wish one of these three women away?’

On this problem the old lawyer worked, with his hands behind him, like a boy before the Euclid board, on his road through the park. Before he came in sight of ‘The Corner’ he exclaimed with triumph, ‘I’ve got it! Roscoe must have done, or be intending to do, something he is very much ashamed of and afraid of being found out. The more eyes that are watching him under the same roof the greater is his danger of discovery; and he wanted to get rid of at least a pair of them. Yes, I feel sure *that* must be it.’

And the lawyer nodded to himself and pulled up his ample and old-fashioned shirt-collar, as was his habit when he had succeeded in any obscure calculation; he thought he had hit the right nail on the head.

CHAPTER XVII.

ELM PLACE.

It is only of late years that the beauties of the Thames have come to be appreciated even by Londoners; I can myself remember the time when that lovely reach between Maidenhead and Cookham was almost unvisited except by local admirers, and when an Eton eight-oar, rare as a whale that strays up from the sea to some river-mouth, used to create quite an excitement.

The Sunday flotillas, to which illiberal shepherds give the

grosser name of Pandemonium, was utterly unknown, and no one who lived on the banks and had a lawn stretching down to the river dreamt that it could one day be his Pactolus. Even to the Americans, who are so quick to discover anything that is worth seeing in England, the Thames was at that time only associated with Windsor. Now all that is changed, and he who visits England for the sake of the picturesque and does not float down—the best way is on barges—from Oxford to Richmond has missed his aim. What is quite peculiar to the Thames, and a very great convenience to people of taste who have also plenty of cash at their bankers', is, that there is scarcely a house on it that cannot be got during the summer months for money. The vicar lets his modest house and garden for that period for a rent that far surpasses his annual stipend; the landed gentleman in these bad times lets his riparian mansion at a price that compensates him for the humiliation; the widow parts temporarily with her modest cottage, and with the proceeds of the transaction makes that tour on the Continent she has so long promised her daughters, but which, had not her house been on the Thames, her poverty must have denied to them. For from twenty-five to fifty guineas a week the wealthy cit for three months of the year can now secure a paradise, which, at the conclusion of his term, he gives up with a sigh to its proprietor, who takes it with a sigh, for he knows that his orange has been squeezed, and floods and frogs will be his portion for the winter. While it lasts, however, there is no heaven on earth to be compared with the Thames heaven.

In the case of the Tremenhare family with their immense income, it was merely a question of which river palace to choose; it is my belief that they could have had any one of them, excepting Windsor Castle, which has never yet been advertised, nor even, so far as I know, been disposed of for the summer months by private contract. It was late in the year, and the house agents shook their heads, but nodded them cheerfully when the Tremenhare purse was shaking before their eyes. If money was really no object, no doubt the matter could be arranged for the ladies, even if some tenant had to be bribed to give up his bargain.

Mr. Roscoe, of course, conducted the negotiations; he felt himself like a Monte Cristo, though only by deputy, and immensely enjoyed the experience. This gentleman, like his deceased partner, believed with all his heart and soul in money; the possession of it afforded him an exquisite pleasure, dashed only by the

reflection that there was not more of it. There, however, the similarity ended. In Josh's character the desire of acquisition never overmastered prudence; Gain with him had been a good dog, but Holdfast was a better.

Edward Roscoe never touched a card nor made a bet, and had a very wholesome contempt for those who dissipated their fortunes in such follies; but he was a born gambler. The Stock Exchange for him supplied the place of the roulette-table and the race-course; and his ventures, compared with his means, were very large. Of this his employer had by some means become aware, and, as we know, had taxed him with it. It was a reason which, even if he had believed him to be an honest man, would have always prevented him from leaving his subaltern in any position of trust as regarded his own fortune; and the knowledge of this fact made Mr. Roscoe as bitter against him as the conditions of the will itself.

When he had selected such summer palaces as he thought most suitable—the family only wanted one for six weeks or so, which, of course, greatly added to its cost—he prepared to take the ladies down to make their choice. The expedition promised to be a somewhat exhausting one, and Agnes volunteered to take this trouble off her sisters' hands. Grace was well content that it should be so; but Philippa objected to the arrangement, and showed an unwonted decision in opposing it. The conflict of opinion between them was sharper than the occasion seemed to warrant. Philippa even lost her temper, and 'said things.' One of them was that Agnes was not yet old enough to go roving about the country alone with a male friend. This remark, though complimentary to a certain limited extent, was not taken in good part. Some very bitter words passed between the two sisters.

'Mr. Roscoe shall decide for us,' at last exclaimed Agnes.

'What! Do you mean to say that you still wish to accompany him alone, notwithstanding what I have said about its impropriety?' inquired Philippa. 'How shameless!'

'I shall do what Mr. Roscoe thinks right,' answered Agnes, with white face and lips that quivered with suppressed passion.

It would have been a pretty quarrel in one sense, though anything but pretty in another, had not the bone of contention, Mr. Roscoe himself, happened to come in, which of course prevented the subject being pursued on exactly the same lines.

They could hardly discuss the delicate question of 'propriety' in his presence ; but each expressed her views with warmth. Between Goneril and Regan this Edmond had a difficult rôle to play, but he played it to perfection. However angry they were with one another, he so contrived it that the arrows of their wrath were never aimed in his direction. Now, as they each looked at him as to their own counsel for his advocacy in their favour, it seemed impossible but that he should make one or other of them his enemy. Yet it was not so ; the office he undertook at once was that of judge. He had favouring eyes for both, though to the close observer there was a difference in the favour. His kindest words were directed to Agnes, his most conciliatory looks were given to Philippa.

'The question is of small importance, my dear ladies, as it seems to me,' he cheerfully observed, 'and there is no need to make a fuss about it. I thought myself, Philippa, as your sister had the management of all domestic matters, that she would be the properest person to make choice of your new home ; and I confess I do not understand, Agnes, why you, who are always so kind as well as sensible, should have any objection to Philippa's accompanying us ; but, on the other hand, the doing so would leave Grace at home alone, which it would hardly be a nice thing to do. Under the circumstances, I must ask you both to leave the matter in my hands. The houses I have selected have all their good points, so that no great mistake can be made in any case, and I will go down by myself and choose the best of them.'

His tone was gentle but firm ; it had a sort of paternal authority in it from which it seemed there was no appeal, for nothing more was said on the subject. There was a look of patient endurance in his face, which each of the ladies flattered themselves had been produced by her antagonist.

'How tiresome the dear fellow must find Philippa !' thought one to herself. 'In what false positions Agnes is always trying to place him !' thought the other.

The next week they all went down to the river. The family circle had an addition in the person of a little black-and-white fox-terrier, Mr. Allerton's promised present to Grace. He was not beautiful (from a dog-fancier's point of view), but accomplished ; that is to say, full of tricks. He tore everything to pieces that he did not swallow, with frantic enjoyment ; and with evident taste preferred a lady's lap to the basket and cushion that had been

provided for him. Whoever was sitting down had to accommodate him ; but, once installed, he was not troublesome so long as he was allowed to absorb some article of her attire ; if he had a preference it was for Brussels lace, of which Philippa, who was now always meditative and self-involved, missed some yards on his first day. Notwithstanding this he soon became a great favourite with the sisters, but especially with his mistress. He was affectionate and full of caresses for them all ; but he had his dislikes, and one of them was for Mr. Roscoe. Sometimes he would get into a sort of hysterical frenzy at his presence, and bark at him as if he would bark his heart out ; but he generally contented himself with a pitiful whine that seemed to say, 'How can you, *can* you, ladies, allow this person to hang about your drawing-room, when you know how I hate him !' It is probable the antagonism was reciprocated, but Mr. Roscoe had his feelings more under control.

Elm Place was somewhat higher up the river than its most beautiful reach (for some reason or other Cliefden had not been procurable) ; but it was a very fine house, and commanded an excellent view. It had a beautiful lawn sloping down to the stream, and an old walled garden at the back, in which Queen Anne had walked, and on certain occasions (though always at night) was even said to 'walk' now. Behind rose great woods, with paths cunningly contrived so that here and there the noble landscape, with the windings of the tranquil river, was made to form a picture set in a leafy frame. This was Grace's favourite retreat ; while her sisters lounged upon the lawn and feasted their eyes upon the ceaseless procession of boats and pleasure-barges, she would, with Rip—'the off-and-on companion of her walk'—climb the full-foliaged hill, and gaze her fill upon less busy scenes mellowed by distance. She had plenty to think of, and more to dream about. Thanks to Mr. Allerton, she was secretly doing a great deal of good, though, as it were, by leverage ; sometimes she wished that she could do it with her own hands. For the first time, the riddle of the painful earth presented itself to her for reflection ; the unequal distribution of wealth, and her own undeserved freedom from the cares and pains of poverty, disturbed her unsophisticated mind. No doubt she was in error, since her father had not been troubled by it ; but then he had had larger views, and found the opportunities for benevolence on a great scale. Her sisters no longer pained her by any reference to him ;

but their very silence on the subject distressed her. However his wealth had benefited others while in his hands, it seemed to give little pleasure to those who had inherited it; she felt that it was somehow the cause of that estrangement between Agnes and Philippa which daily grew more marked. She knew not how to make peace between them; she only vaguely understood that they were jealous of one another; and any interference on her part, being so much the younger, she felt would be resented. It was a relief to her when her reflections were broken in upon by some piteous and smothered howls from her little companion, whom half a dozen times a day she had to pull out by his tail from a rabbit-hole into which the excitement of the chase had carried him further than he had intended. It might have been written with justice upon Rip's grave that 'He never, never caught a rabbit,' but he tried to catch one many times. The 'motive,' however, upon which the divines very properly lay such stress, let us hope, was sufficiently punished on each occasion by his being so nearly buried alive.

One morning Mr. Roscoe, who was lodging at Milton, a village nearly opposite Elm Place, much frequented by boating-men, brought over with him a visitor, Lord Cheribert. The two elder sisters were, as usual, on the lawn, and gave him an eager welcome. He was not unknown to them, as we are aware, but they had probably never expected to see him again. They were much better informed than Grace of the nature of the relations that had existed between their father and the aristocracy, and were very pleased to be thus taken notice of. They had seen scarcely anyone since their bereavement, and even an ordinary morning caller would have been treated with rapture—a lord was, of course, a godsend.

The young fellow addressed a few words of sympathy to them, in suitable tones, but soon observed, much to his relief, that their woe had been already relegated to what the mourning establishments call 'the mitigated grief department,' and it did not seem to him surprising. It was impossible, he thought in his artless way, that anybody should really be in the doldrums who had come into such a 'pot of money.' Josh's will had not yet been published, but the fact of his finding them where they were was proof that his 'little leavings' (as his lordship spoke of them, just as his nautical friends called London 'the village') had taken a natural direction.

'We did not know you were a boating man, Lord Cheribert,' said Agnes graciously, with a glance at his aquatic costume.

'Nor am I,' he replied, with a slight blush (by no means caused, however, by this reference to his airy garb); 'I am much better at steering than pulling; but the fact is, I had some business with Mr. Roscoe (he would never call him 'Roscoe,' which annoyed that gentleman excessively), and, finding him down at Milton, I could not resist the temptation of looking in upon you. I hope Miss Grace is well.'

He had been looking round for her with some impatience, which both the sisters set down to its true cause, yet, strangely enough, without the least feeling of jealousy. It might have been thought by some that this angelic state of affairs resulted from the peculiar conditions of their father's will, which made it to their advantage that Grace should find a wooer; but, to do them justice, it was not so. They did not covet Lord Cheribert except as a very eligible acquaintance, and they thought it only natural that the youth and beauty of their sister should have made an impression on him. They had no desire to be enriched at her expense, which would, after all, be only an increase to their incomes, concerning which they had nothing to complain of. Yet if Lord Cheribert's visit had any serious intention as regarded Grace, it would make little difference to her, since they knew he was heir to a vast estate, whether she had her money or not; while to have a brother-in-law who would one day be a peer of the realm was an idea little short of rapturous.

'As to Grace,' said Agnes, smiling, 'you will probably have the opportunity of judging of the state of her health, Lord Cheribert, with your own eyes, for here comes her *avant-courrier*. Where is your mistress, Rip?'

Rip was tearing down from the house to them as usual at full speed; he whirled round the ladies like a dancing dervish, snatched at the hem of Mr. Roscoe's trousers with an angry bark, and then leapt into Lord Cheribert's lap as he sat in the garden chair, and ensconced himself on his soft flannels as though he had taken a lease of them for the summer months.

'What a dear dog!' exclaimed his lordship, in acknowledgment of this friendly conduct.

'You may well say that,' said Philippa; 'we calculate that he has cost us about fifty pounds already in breakages and depredations, and we have only had him a month.'

'Can he swim?' inquired Lord Cheribert, without thinking of what he was saying; for his thoughts, like his eyes, were fixed on a figure that now made its appearance at the open drawing-room window.

'I am sorry to say he can,' said Mr. Roscoe gloomily. 'He is not charming, to my mind, but he bears a charmed life.'

'How can you talk so cruelly!' said Philippa reproachfully, and Agnes made a blow at the hard-hearted speaker with her parasol which would have scarcely injured a gnat.

'I am torn by contending emotions, Miss Grace!' exclaimed the young lord, smiling. 'I want to rise to do you honour, but I am afraid of disturbing your little favourite.'

'Pray keep your seat, Lord Cheribert.'

Her tone was gracious as she held out her hand to him, but very grave. She was thinking of the last and only time she had seen him, when he had been introduced to her by her father. She wore, of course, the same deep mourning as her sisters, but, as it seemed to the visitor, with a difference. It is not the trappings and the suits of woe that make us sad to look upon, but the heart that mourns within us; yet to his eye the girl appeared more beautiful in her sorrow than she had in her joy upon her birthday *fête*.

'I should not have called so soon,' he murmured apologetically, 'but that I found myself so near your house.'

'We are glad to see you. I had heard of your kind inquiries about us from Mr. Allerton—they touched me very much,' she added softly, and with a break in her voice.

'I should have been very ungrateful if I had forgotten——' Here he stopped; he had been about to say 'what I owed to your father,' but he suddenly recollected that the phrase was open to a double meaning. It was not possible that what one owed to him could be forgotten, since 'Josh' had taken great care to have it put down in black and white. The young man's unfinished sentence, however, was undesignedly perfect, and she thanked him for it with her eyes.

'We must think it a great compliment that Lord Cheribert looked in upon us,' explained Agnes, 'since he is not a devotee to aquatics, he tells us, though he wears the garb of one.'

'I am glad to be doing so, since Miss Grace's little dog seems so partial to flannels,' said the young fellow.

It was rather an indirect method of pleasing Rip's mistress;

but Agnes was too satisfied with the motive to question the speech. To find a lord so civil to them was in itself a joy. The speaker himself, on the other hand, was uneasily conscious of having said something ridiculous, and, as is usual in such cases, blundered on.

'At least, if it isn't the flannels, I can't think how I have so soon ingratiated myself into his affections. Perhaps our characters are sympathetic. What is the little doggie's name?'

'Rip!' exclaimed Mr. Roscoe with unmistakable significance.

Lord Cheribert laughed aloud, but the colour rushed into his face. The two elder ladies kept their eyes riveted on the ground, in silence; but Grace, unconscious of the unfortunate coincidence, came to the rescue.

'Rip is a very affectionate, well-meaning dog,' she said, 'notwithstanding his bad name and naughty ways.'

The young lord, who was not without a sense of humour, removed his cap in acknowledgment of the unintended compliment, and the rest of the party relieved their feelings by a ripple of laughter.

'I really don't see——' began Grace, blushing to her forehead.

'Then I beg nobody to open your eyes,' interrupted the young man fervently. 'Your sisters and Mr. Roscoe are bent upon blackening my character, Miss Grace. It is as pure as the snow—after it has fallen a day or two,' and he joined heartily in the mirth of the others.

There is nothing that puts people on such easy terms with one another as a joke at the expense of one of them good-humouredly enjoyed; and Lord Cheribert—who was very easily put at his ease—found himself quite at home.

(To be continued.)

MOSTLY FOOLS.

THE professional fool is to be found in the records of ancient days. Democritus acted in that capacity at the court of Darius. Xenophon, in his account of the banquet at the villa of Callias, introduces a fool by vocation, named Philip. The jests made by him have lost their aroma in the lapse of time. It is said that Philip of Macedon entertained a buffoon for his own private amusement, and in his days a band or club existed called 'the Sixty,' who met in the temple of Hercules and uttered witticisms which were carefully written down. At the court of Antiochus was found Herodotus, a professional jester, surnamed Logomimus.

Passing by an immense number of buffoons and their jokes, most of which seem to us very stupid, we come to the later Romans, of whom the rich maintained slaves specially commissioned to amuse them. The consul Petronius Arbitrator, feeling the approach of death, sent for all the wits, high and low, of his acquaintance, to keep him laughing until his last moment, when his features were fixed in a ghastly grin.

The monarchs of England, of France, of Spain, of Germany, all kept jesters, more or less historical, more or less celebrated. The most joyous and light-hearted nation of Europe is the French, who in the terrible days at the end of the eighteenth century could attend the entertainment in the Place de la Révolution in the morning, and another at the theatre in the evening; and the most famous fools have been attached to the courts of the French kings. Such names as Triboulet and D'Angély are more widely known than Archie Armstrong and Will Summers of the English courts. To begin with an early date, we will speak of the *fol* named Golet, and his great exploit. In 1047 the Norman nobles had joined in a formidable league against their young Duke William, afterwards the Conqueror. One night, while he slept, his fool Golet came rapping on the door of his chamber, bidding him, in doggerel verse, to rise and arm, lest his enemies should come and kill him. William arose at the voice of his fool, and went forth to win the battle of the Val des Dunes. So clever and faithful a fool deserves to head the list.

We come next to one Roger, also a Norman, in the service of

the Duke-King Henry II. In 1180 he travelled, in company with two horses and seven dogs, to join his master. His expenses being noted in the Exchequer accounts make us aware of his existence. Another fool was in the employ of John Lackland, Duke of Normandy and King of England; he had a feudal title to his functions, and held lands on the tenure of quibbles and *bons mots*. About the year 1200 John gave an estate called *Fontaine Osanne*, or *Fontaine-aux-ânes* (whichever you like), to Guillaume Picolfe, on condition of his supplying the court with amusement.

No doubt professional buffoons existed long before the eleventh century. Among the ancients, madmen and idiots were accounted inspired and sacred; but it will perhaps be more entertaining to come down to modern days than to ascend towards the mists of antiquity. After all, these jesters, often sad enough in private life, had but a short reign; their immediate predecessors, the jugglers, had been dismissed his court by Philippe Auguste in 1181, and such of them as still lingered on in France were very hardly dealt with by the Synod of Bayeux; the buffoons themselves seem to have died out almost entirely in the sixteenth century. The jugglers were transmuted into minstrels, of whom Richard Cœur de Lion's Blondel was one, and then the minstrels into poets-laureate, while the fools, at first cousins-german to the minstrels, are now very distant relations, though Lord Tennyson and a strolling clown may be descended from one ancestor.

The common people hear more gladly the clown than the poet; a jest is ever more popular than a sermon; and there have been many preachers whose pulpit jokes are the only remembered portions of their harangues. Olivier Maillard, preaching of the souls in purgatory, said that when they hear the chink of money given for their benefit, 'tin, tin, tin,' they burst out laughing, 'ha, ha, ha! hi, hi, hi!' One can imagine a congregation cachinating in chorus with the orator. Michel Menot, reproving the ladies for being late at church, told them that it would take less time to cleanse the Augean stable than to stick in all a woman's pins. The story is told of Rowland Hill that he once began a sermon with the words, 'Look at my wife there with a chest of drawers on her head.' The congregation stared at the poor lady thus pointed out, but only perceived that she wore a new bonnet. 'She has sold a chest of drawers, and bought a new bonnet with the proceeds.' Then he went on to inveigh against female love of dress. On another occasion he read his text, 'Phil. iv. 13, "I can

do all things." 'Bet you a guinea of that, St. Paul.' Pulling a guinea out of his pocket, he threw it down on the pulpit cushion. "In Him that strengtheneth me." Ah! to be sure. Drawn bet, drawn bet.'

Perhaps the prince of preaching jesters was the famous Father André of the eighteenth century, who, being at Valenciennes at the end of March, invited all the town to hear him preach on the 1st prox. A large audience assembled; he went up into the pulpit, cried out 'Poisson d'Avril!' and disappeared amid a fanfare of drums and trumpets.

Returning to fools by profession, we will cite the judgment, worthy of Sancho Panza, delivered in a trial pleaded before Seigni Johan, and described by Rabelais. A porter held his piece of bread in the smoke of a cook's fire, and declined to pay for the flavour it thereby acquired. Seigni made the porter chink his money, and decided that the sound of silver was valid payment for the smell of roast meat. This Johan or Jean André died in 1348. The word Seigni may mean *Senex, the old*, or may be an abridged form of *Seigneur*.

King John, who reigned from 1350 to 1364, entertained his own fool, and also a fool for his son the Dauphin, afterwards Charles le Sage. The latter fool, named Miction, was extremely choice in his apparel; his milliner's bills would have furnished a text to the Reverend Michel Menot. This fool of high degree accompanied John of France when the latter was conducted to England as the prisoner and guest of the Black Prince. Even in captivity the brilliant buffoon decked his outer man in various new garments; for the comfort of his inner man he paid half a guinea to a London apothecary for an electuary. When King John left England, five carriages were provided, one for his Majesty, one for his gentlemen of the chamber, one for Prince Philippe, one for 'Maistre Jehan le fol,' and one for his butlers, cooks, &c.

Charles le Sage, when king, had three fools; of the first the name is not known, the second was the celebrated Thevenin, who died in 1374, the third was called Grand Johan. Jeanne, wife of Charles, had also her own fool, Artaude du Puy.

The unhappy Charles VI., deprived of reason, was provided with distraction in the shape of several fools. One of these, Hainselin Coq, required forty-seven pairs of shoes in the year 1404. In this reign appeared also 'Johanne la folle,' and several

casual buffoons, of whom one 'Jehan de la Marche' preached before the king.

Queen Isabeau entertained a male and a female fool, the former named Guillaume Fouel, the latter Jehannine. Fouel had worn out from January 1387 to the following July 103 pairs of boots and shoes! The queen also kept in her pay a dwarf and a menagerie of wild beasts.

When we reach the age of Louis XI. we seem to be on known ground. Scott, in his 'Quentin Durward,' has made us long ago acquainted intimately with that amiable monarch and his congenial surroundings. Villon, a rhymester-buffoon, was great at practical jokes. He was an excellent representative of the Devil in the Mystery plays. Brother Stephen Tappecoue, sacristan of the Abbey of St. Maixent, refused to allow Villon the use of a cope and stole in which to personate God the Father. To revenge himself, the fool got together his regular troupe of demons, dressed up as animals, who, falling in a body on brother Stephen, knocked him off his mare who dragged him along the ground until more than his nether garments was scratched and torn, and in the end the mare carried back to the monastery nothing but the right foot and shoe of the unfortunate sacristan. Villon complimented his demons highly on their performance.

Of Louis XI. it has been said that all his attendants and companions were fools, though not *en titre d'office*. Le Glorieux, who plays a conspicuous part in 'Quentin Durward,' may not have been so amusing as Scott represents him, but there seems no reason to doubt that he overheard Louis' private confession of the murder of his brother; that he should proclaim his knowledge of the damning fact seems unlikely in one so clever as a fool must needs be, for he might have held it like a sword of Damocles over the head of the fratricide.

Triboulet is perhaps the most illustrious fool of whom we have any memoirs. His real name appears to have been Ferial, and his brother was one of the king's cooks. Marot, the contemporary poet, paints his good qualities in verse. The chief of these was the faculty of saying most outrageous things without giving offence. And yet Louis XII. thought it well to keep Triboulet under the charge of a governor. At a great processional entry into Rouen the governor desired the fool to check his horse, but more and more did the horse curvet and prance. At length Triboulet said piteously that it was very hard, for the more he

spurred his steed the more the beast would not stand still. Triboulet made one of the sights of the marriage ceremony of Louis XII. with Mary of England, and took part in the funeral procession of his master. At the court of Francis I. Triboulet sat in the king's counsel. It is told of him that he once sold his horse in order to buy hay! He went to vespers at the Sainte Chapelle in Paris and cudgelled the bishop who began the service, because he thus disturbed the pleasant silence. A great lord having threatened to beat Triboulet to death, the latter complained to Francis, who replied, 'If he does anything of the sort I will hang him ten minutes after your death.' The fool rejoined, 'Ah, my cousin, please hang him ten minutes before.' He crossed a bridge without a parapet in company with a nobleman, who remarked, 'Why have they not put a *garde-fous*?' Triboulet answered, 'They did not know that *we* should cross it.' In our own days Triboulet has been rendered real and pathetic in Victor Hugo's play 'Le Roi s'amuse,' known best to English people in the form of the opera 'Rigoletto.'

Triboulet had many rivals during his life: some of them remain nameless; others, such as Jouan, the fool of the Queen-Dowager Louise of Savoy, are known to us by name. The great Rabelais played the part of a buffoon to the eternal admiration of the world. Finding himself, on the road to Paris, quite out of funds, he filled some bottles with ashes, labelling them 'Poison for the King.' He contrived to be suspected and denounced by his landlord, and so to be sent to Paris, where he confessed his *ruse*, and was set at liberty. He jested on his death-bed: 'I am going to seek a great *perhaps*, which is in the magpie's nest.' He said to his friends shortly before he expired, 'Let the curtain fall, the farce is played out.'

Henry II. entertained three fools: Maître Pierre, Thony, and Brusquet; the real name of the latter was Jean Antoine Lombart. His pleasantries took the form chiefly of practical jokes, but he contrived to fill his pockets by his absurdities. His puns are not translatable; for instance, his suggestion that the Chancellor should be called on to *seller* (saddle) an unruly mule, because he was accustomed to *sceller* (seal) everything brought before him. Brusquet had a horse which nearly broke the neck of a nobleman, and quite broke his own. 'Strange,' said Brusquet, 'that he should kill himself; he never did so before.' One of his practical jokes must have been very amusing to himself. The Queen

wished to see Brusquet's wife; he informed the Queen that his wife was very deaf, and told his wife that the Queen was very deaf. The vocal contest at this audience may be better imagined than described.

About the middle of the sixteenth century we come upon the names of some female fools: one known as Madame de Rambouillet, another as Cathelot, a third as La Jardinière, a fourth as Jacquette.

Sibilot was the first fool employed by Henry III. In this reign also appears the folle Mathurine, who devoted her bauble to the service of the Church! When Henry IV. bought his throne by a mass, he went immediately after the *Te Deum* to the Louvre, where Mathurine met him on the stairs, having dwelt there until she could welcome him back to the palace of his ancestors—a touching trait in the character of one whose morality does not bear close inspection. When Jean Chastel, in a room full of company, attempted to assassinate Henry, the King at first accused Mathurine of the crime, but she had already run to close the doors of the chamber and prevent the escape of the criminal. She was usually present to amuse Henry at his dinner; she survived him and played the same part toward Louis XIII. She was usually dressed *en amazone*. Her death occurred in 1627.

Chicot deserves special notice. He was at first a warm partisan of the Lorraine faction, and took part in the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. In 1588 he was the fool of Henry III., though apparently not decked with cap and bells. Sully, in his 'Memoirs,' mentions some tricks played by Chicot. At the siege of Rouen, in 1592, Chicot, now in the service of Henry IV., took prisoner the Comte de Chaligny, and led him to the king, saying, 'Look here, I give thee my prisoner.' The Comte, much vexed to find that he had yielded his sword to a buffoon, snatched it back, and beat the poor fool soundly with the disputed weapon. The wounded man was carried away to the surgeons; in the room where he was laid there was also a dying soldier, to whom the vicar of the place refused absolution because he had fought under a Huguenot king. Chicot flung himself out of bed, and expressed his opinion roundly, by word and deed, of the intolerance of the priest. This was the last action of the royalist buffoon. A fortnight later he died of his wounds—a pathetic ending of a life of drollery.

Henry IV.'s next fool was called Guillaume Marchand. He

began life as an apothecary, and was fond of listening to bizarre sermons of the style affected by Messrs. Maillard and Menot, as mentioned above; Guillaume was also somewhat of a mystic; and so many ingredients, mingled with very little wits, rendered him sufficiently learned and foolish for the life which he afterwards led. When the city of Louviers was taken by the Leaguers, Marchand received a blow on the head which still further softened his brain. He went to the young Cardinal de Bourbon, who found him very diverting; on the death of the Cardinal it appears that he entered the service of Henry, and succeeded to Chicot's office. He was, although paid by Henry, a warm adherent of the League, and when he and Mathurine met they had many a battle royal.

Maitre Guillaume indulged in strange visions; he persuaded himself that he had been in the Ark with Noah. The Cardinal de Perron, a bit of a wag himself, questioned Guillaume and made him confess that, as he had not been Noah, nor Noah's wife, nor Noah's son, nor Noah's daughter-in-law, he could not have been one of the eight persons saved, but must probably have been one of the beasts. 'Well,' said the fool, hesitating, 'in writing of great people we do not mention their servants; I was one of Noah's servants.'

The date of Marchand's death is uncertain. He left a collection of volumes containing chiefly his own extravagances. These do not strike us as very brilliant; for instance, this stanza—

L'on me fait mort,
Mals c'est à tort;
Car ma folie
Demeure en vie.

Perhaps the greatest compliment paid to this jester was that of Régnier, who published his 'Fourteenth Satire' under the pseudonym of Guillaume Marchand.

Passing over several fools of minor rank, we come to Angouevent, whose real name was Nicholas Joubert, and whose title was *Prince of Fools*. He and Bernard Bluet, *Comte de Permission*,¹ were rivals in folly, but their mutual recriminations now read as utterly stupid. The latter picked up a living as best he could; and both died in great indigence and misery.

Louis XIII. was always surrounded by buffoons, to the just indignation of the aged Sully. One of these was Marais, whose

¹ Certain offices in France carried with them the courtesy title of *Comte*.

wit was of an order coarse even in his own day ; another was Jean Doucet, who only occasionally plied his trade in the king's presence.

Cardinal Richelieu, who was more king of France than was Louis, entertained several fools, though they were not officially so named. When his eminence was out of spirits, his physicians would prescribe 'a quarter of an hour of Boisrobert.' And when Boisrobert, who was an Academician, failed to amuse the cardinal, a summons was sent to Jean Pierre le Camus, Bishop of Belley, who generally succeeded better ! Another reverend joker was M. de Raconis, Bishop of Lavaur, who used to preach mock sermons in private for Richelieu's delectation.

The name of L'Angély is famous, enshrined in Boileau's First Satire. His origin is wrapped in obscurity ; but it is said that the Prince de Condé presented him to Louis XIII., who made him his official fool. However that may be, it is certain that he was the jester of Louis XIV., and also the last of the court fools of France. His witticisms have lost their savour in the course of time, but his blunt speeches made him feared, and made him rich.

'Le Bibliophile Jacob' (Paul Lacroix) gives this anecdote : 'At Versailles there was, a few years ago, a white-haired old man, who dwelt amid old furniture, old pictures, old draperies, and all sorts of relics of the time of Louis XIV. ; all of which indicated the part which he had played in that reign ; he had been also the *bouffon* of Marie Antoinette. He showed us, weeping, some grains of coffee which he had received from the unfortunate queen ; to whom he had said : "For the first time I am sorry that so great a queen has so small a hand."'

The jester of Marie Antoinette could not but wear a lifelong shade of the pathetic. And it must be confessed that, among the facetiæ of the fools of happier monarchs, there is little recorded of genuine humour. Coarse jokes are not witty ; and a search among the sayings of French buffoons results in few things worth repeating. Some specimens will suffice.

A fool, being asked whence he came, replied that he came from Paris, where he thought something grave must be the matter, for, when he left, all the shops were closed. Supposing that the king must be dead, the soldiers were called to arms, and great excitement prevailed, when someone asked further, 'At what hour did you leave ?' The fool replied, 'At four in the morning, when everyone was in bed.' On another occasion the same jester informed a gentleman that more than thirty thousand men had

risen that day in Paris. 'For what reason?' asked the gentleman. 'In order to go to bed again to-night.' This genius consoled a widower by remarking that his lamented wife could not have been a good woman or she would not have left her husband!

A certain fool was called by his master the *King of Fools*. He said one day, 'Would indeed I were the King of Fools! I should have the greatest empire of the world, and you would be one of my vassals.'

A fool said to his fellow parishioners, 'Why are you so stupid as to pay the curé for burying your dead? Surely it is enough for him to have your bodies without having your goods too.'

Dialogue between a tradesman and a fool: 'What is your name?' 'The same as my godfather's.' 'And what is his name?' 'The same as mine.' 'And what is the name of you both?' 'Each the same as the other.'

A lady said to a fool, 'I suppose you are going to tell me my faults?' 'Nay, Madame,' he replied, 'I do not discourse on matters of which the whole town is talking.'

The question arose which should take the first place, the lawyer or the physician. Said the fool, 'The thief goes first to the gallows, the executioner follows him.'

Crossing the silver streak, and studying the history of the fools of the English court, we find that one Hitard (should not an 'h' be inserted between the 't' and the 'a'?) was the jester of Edmund Ironside, who bestowed on him the town of Walworth. Hitard, in his old age, and when about to travel to Rome, there to die, made a deed which conveyed his manor to the cathedral of Canterbury.

Of Golet, fool to William the Conqueror, we have already heard. Another of William's buffoons was Berdic, who was rewarded with three towns and other landed property. Matilda, Queen of Henry I., entertained a minstrel named Rahere, who, as was usual with fools in those days, though hardly in these, amassed a large fortune. Growing weary of folly, he visited Rome, where he turned over a new leaf, blank no doubt at first, but on his way home impressed with a wonderful vision in which St. Bartholomew played an important part. The Apostle commanded Rahere to found a church in Smithfield, and soon afterwards was established the Priory of St. Bartholomew. The monastery was dissolved by Henry VIII., but from its ashes sprang up the great hospital bearing the same name.

Edward II. had a fool called Robert Withastaf, to whose mother Dulcian the king presented ten shillings when she came to court; Edward also had a female jester, a noted horsewoman. Of Robert Bruce, contemporary with Edward, we are told that he kept 'a fool and a lion.' In the household of Edward was found the famous Scogan, a student of Oriel College, Oxford. In 1471 the Plague drove Scogan from Oxford; he engaged himself as fool to Sir William Neville, who made him a present to the king. Edward was so well pleased with the 'joculator' that he bestowed on him a house in Cheapside, and a mansion at Bury. Like other jesters of the middle ages, Scogan's jokes were often practical ones. He borrowed a large sum of money from the king, and, being unable to repay it, he arranged with his friends that he should die and be carried forth to burial by a road on which he should be sure to meet his royal creditor. All happened propitiously. 'Alas, poor Scogan! A fellow of infinite wit! I freely forgive him the money which he owed me.' Thereupon up jumped Scogan, crying aloud, 'Your Grace's goodness has restored me to life!' His conduct at court afterwards became intolerable, and he was forbidden, upon pain of death, ever to stand again upon English soil. So, imitating Naaman when he asked of Elisha 'two mules' burdens of earth' from Palestine, he had his shoes filled with soil from Picardy, and thus evaded the penalty which he deserved.

Andrew Borde, of Pevensey, physician to Henry VIII., published a volume of jests, neither witty nor decent, attributing them to Scogan; but they are no more Scogan's effusions than every *Joe Miller* is the production of Joseph Miller. The term *Merry Andrew* is derived from the name of Andrew Borde.

Henry VIII. had official jesters as well as the medical one; by the name of Patch is well known the buffoon who was previously in the service of Cardinal Wolsey. He was so much attached to his clerical master that only by force could he be made to leave Wolsey and join Henry; but he soon settled into his place at court, and even ventured on such impertinent speeches as displeased the not very thin-skinned monarch. Will Summers was another of Henry's fools. Entries are quoted of clothes provided for him: 'a coat and a cap of green cloth, fringed with red crape and lined with frieze;' also a 'coat of green cloth, with hood to the same, fringed with white, and lined with frieze and buckram.' The professional fool's garb was always motley; his *bauble* was a short staff with a

ridiculous head, to which was attached an inflated bladder, used by him for sham castigations. This bauble was called in French the *marotte*, and, as fools did not entirely disappear from England until after the reign of Charles II., the word 'bauble,' applied by Cromwell to the mace of the Speaker of the House of Commons, was far more opprobrious than it would be now, when we use it as synonymous with *gew-gaw* or *knick-knack*. In the second volume of Strutt's 'Dress and Habits,' plate lxxi. shows four figures of jesters. The three first wear the cap and bells; the first of the three carries his bauble, and is biting the tail of a dog, which is evidently howling and trying to bite its persecutor; the middle fool wears boots with long pointed toes, and carries an owl on his wrist; his coat and cap are parti-coloured; the third buffoon is pointing at his own open mouth. Below, there is a small engraving of a man without bells or cap, carrying a bauble, and eating a cake. They are all of the fourteenth century; but the garb did not alter considerably until much later times.

John Heywood was fool to Henry VIII., having been introduced to the king by Sir Thomas More. Mary Tudor had a great regard for Heywood, who indulged in much audacious talk. Bold as were his sayings, few of them appear witty. A landlord asked him 'How do you like my beer? Is it not well hopped?' 'So well,' replied Heywood, 'that had it hopped a little further, it would have hopped into water.' Dr. Doran, in his 'History of Court Fools,' gives several specimens of Heywood's rhymed epigrams; one of them is perhaps worth transcribing:—

'Where am I least, husband?' Quoth he, 'in the waist;
Which cometh of this, thou art vengeable strait-laced.
Where am I biggest, wife?' 'In the waist, too,' quoth she,
'For all is waste in you, as far as I can see.'

Heywood was a devoted Catholic; and after Mary's death he took up his abode in Mechlin, and died there, jesting, it is said, with his last breath.

Though Elizabeth was so good a Protestant that Heywood could not live near her court, she was so bad a Protestant as to have a crucifix and lighted tapers in her private chapel; and Pace, her jester, was employed by Archbishop Parker to destroy those obnoxious ornaments in the queen's oratory.

Chester, another buffoon of that reign, was so scurrilous in his talk that Sir Walter Raleigh and Lord Knollys made him drunk and then had him built round with masonry, and only desisted

from roofing him in on his promising never again to joke at their expense. Another gentleman whom he had abused stopped his mouth by sealing his beard and moustache together with wax.

Elizabeth entertained many jesters, who, in their turn, entertained her: Clod, Tarleton, and others. Her successor also had official buffoons. Passing over the less famous of these, we come to Archibald Armstrong, one of the most celebrated fools on record.

Armstrong was born in Cumberland, and at a very early age entered the service of James I., before which he had been, tradition says, a sheep-stealer. He went with Charles and Buckingham on their secret matrimonial expedition into Spain. He sent from thence a letter to the king, signed by his mark, in which he asks James to provide him with an interpreter of the Spanish language; he had an English servant with him as valet. Archie Armstrong contrived to amass a large fortune; of him it is written:—

‘ Archie, by kings and princes graced of late,
Jested himself into a fair estate.’

Archbishop Laud was the object of Archie's deep dislike, and of some of his bitterest sarcasms. He once, in presence of Charles I., asked leave, though Laud was present, to say grace before dinner. Permission being granted, the jester said, ‘Great thanks be given to God, and little Laud to the Devil.’ When Laud's anxiety to bring all Scotland into the Episcopal Church had resulted in very serious opposition, Archie scoffed at Laud for his want of success; and, after the news of the rising at Stirling against the Liturgy, he dared to accost Laud, on his way to the Council Chamber, with the question ‘Who's the fool now?’ This insult was too great: the jester was brought before the Council and condemned to have his coat pulled over his head, and to be banished the court, which sentence was immediately executed. For all that, Armstrong did not cease to revile the prelate.

The jester lived to see his enemy Laud perish on the scaffold, his patron Charles also murdered at Whitehall, Cromwell dead on his ‘lucky day.’ In 1646 Archie married Sibella Bell, and in 1672 he died, most appropriately, on the 1st of April.

The last of the official court fools in England was Muckle John. He appears to have dressed very gorgeously, but not in motley; scarlet and crimson were his favourite colours. But Thomas Killigrew held an analogous position at the court of Charles II. He was born in 1611; mention is made of him by Pepys, under date February 13, 1667–8: ‘Mr. Brisbane tells me,

in discourse, that Tom Killigrew hath a fee out of the Wardrobe for cap and bells, under the title of the King's Foole or Jester, and may revile or jeer anybody, the greatest person, without offence, by the privilege of his place.' No document has been found of the nature of a warrant appointing Killigrew court jester, but he is styled in the accounts of the wardrobe 'one of the grooms of the chamber.' His jests appear to have been of a serious cast, and certainly he spoke to 'the greatest person' with extraordinary boldness. He once appeared before Charles dressed as a pilgrim. 'Whither go you?' asked the King. 'To Hades,' replied Killigrew. 'And for what purpose?' 'To bring back Oliver Cromwell, whose firm, wise rule is much needed.' On another occasion Tom went about saying gravely that the King was suffering from a sore nose. Charles sent for him: 'Why do you say this?' 'I thought,' answered the jester, 'that your nose must be sore, because you have been so long led by it.' Other audacious speeches are recorded of Killigrew; Charles never resented them, and sometimes took the strong hints conveyed in them.

Killigrew was sent as resident to Venice, but his conduct was so profligate and so dishonourable that the Doge, Francesco Erizzo, soon got rid of him.

After this date we find no more court fools, though the office was not extinct in private families. The Earl of Suffolk kept a fool called Dicky Pearce, who died in 1728, and whose epitaph was written by Swift; and Lord Chancellor Talbot (1734) had a fool named Rees Pengelding. But in England the professional buffoon soon afterwards ceased to inhabit palaces and mansions. His ministrations were confined to the stage, and those who seek him must do so at theatre or fair.

Spain had its official fools, but I do not find that any of their witticisms are worth transcribing here. They were not unknown in Italy, where Giulio Cesare Croce published '*Le Sottilissime Astuzie di Bertaldo*.' This Bertaldo appeared at the court of Alboin, King of the Lombards in the sixth century, where the *fou en titre d'office* was named Fagotto. These two played off their jokes one against the other. The stories of their doings are long and, to modern thinking, not at all amusing. More entertaining are some anecdotes told of Gonella, jester to Borso, Duke of Ferrara, in the fifteenth century. As Gonella was on his way to mass, three blind beggars implored an alms of him. 'Here is a

florin for you,' said the jester, 'divide it amongst you.' He gave nothing, and passed on. The beggars invoked blessings on him, each supposing that one of his fellows was in possession of the coin. When they wished to divide the gift, not one of them would allow that he held it, and they mutually accused each other of cheating, and from words proceeded to blows. Gonella watched the fray with great complacency, and when the beggars were all bruised and bleeding he went on to church with a clear and calm conscience.

The Duke of Ferrara fell ill, and the doctors declared that only a sudden fright would restore him to health. He was too great a man for anyone to play tricks on except his fool. Gonella was with him in a boat, and cleverly pushed the Duke into the water. Aid had been previously provided, and the Prince was drawn ashore and put to bed. The fright and the bath and the bed cured the invalid, but he was so enraged with Gonella that he exiled the man who was both a fool and a physician. Gonella returned in a cart filled with Paduan soil; an evasion of the edict of banishment said to have been practised by many a jester. The Duke ordered him to be beheaded, but saying privately that he would only repay fright with fright, he directed the executioner not to use the axe, but to let fall a single drop of water on the culprit's neck. Gonella was led to the scaffold; all the usual gloomy preparations were made. He was blindfolded, and made to lay his head on the block. The executioner, from a phial, let fall a drop of water on Gonella's neck. Then amid shouts and laughter the jester, silent now, was bidden to rise and thank the Duke for his clemency. But Gonella never moved; he was dead—killed by his master's jest.

Rudolph, Count of Hapsburg, Emperor of Germany towards the end of the thirteenth century, had a fool by name Pfaff Cappadox; and Maximilian I. kept a very famous jester, Kunz, or Conrad von den Rosen, whose portrait, like that of Will Summers, was painted by Holbein. Manlius says of Kunz, 'Ich könne ihn nicht einen Possenreise nennen, denn unter geringen Steinen sind Gemmen selten.' Maximilian being a prisoner at Bruges, was urged by Kunz to escape in the priest's garb which the latter had assumed in order to obtain access to his beloved master. But had Maximilian so disappeared, the jester would probably have been hanged. The prince was as noble as his servant, and refused to run the risk involved. Both were afterwards released, When

Maximilian died in 1519, his fool 'of the roses' said, 'I have followed him so long that I will follow him still,' and did so.

'Klaus Narr, oder Klaus von Raustadt, Hofnarr Friedrichs der Weisen,' is supposed to have been the most famous of German court fools. His wit, like that of Kunz and of most jesters, has pretty well lost its savour by this time.

Licence of speech and indecency of conduct were in the middle ages accounted highly humorous; we see the licence and the indecency but not the humour. As a favourable specimen I will quote a dialogue between Philip, Landgrave of Baden, and a fool, Peter Bärenhaut. Philip complains of a terrible headache, the consequence of a drinking bout: '*Peter*. I know a cure for it. *Philip*. What is the remedy? *Peter*. Drink again to-day. *Philip*. Then I shall suffer still more to-morrow. *Peter*. Then you must drink still more. *Philip*. And what would be the end of such a course? *Peter*. Why, in your being a bigger fool than I am.' Such fooling is not very exquisite.

Jesters who acted professionally at the Prussian Court, though not by letters patent, were extant so late as the year 1776, when the last of them was seen at the electoral court at Mannheim by Dr. John Moore, the author of the famous, though almost forgotten, novel '*Zeluco*,' and the father of Sir John Moore who died at Corunna.

Fools were patronised by popes, by prelates, and by priests. I have mentioned how Richelieu was doctored and amused by clerics well pleased to wear metaphorically the cap and bells. Wolsey's joculator Saxton said that he hoped his master would become Pope: 'St. Peter, being a fisherman's son, ordered all men to eat fish on fast-days; your eminence, being a butcher's son, would order us to eat meat all the year round.' If Saxton had known as much of his contemporaries as we do, he would have hesitated before calling Wolsey the son of a butcher.

A COURT-DAY IN FIJI.

A BRIGHT sky vying with the sea for blueness, a sun whose rays are not too hot to be cooled by the seabreeze, the distant roar of the great Pacific rollers as they break in foam on the coral reef, the whisper of the feathery palms as they wave their giant leaves above yonder cluster of brown native huts—all these form a picture whose poetry is not easily reconciled with the stern prose of an English court of law. It is perhaps as well that the legal forms we are accustomed to have been modified to meet the wants of this remote province of the Queen's dominions, for the spot we are describing is accounted remote even in remote Fiji, and the people are proportionately primitive. The natives of Fiji are amenable to a criminal code known as the Native Regulations. These are administered by two courts—the District Court, which sits monthly and is presided over by a native magistrate, and the Provincial Court, which assembles every three months before the English and native magistrates sitting together. From the latter there is no appeal except by petition to the governor, and it has now become the resort of all Fijians who are in trouble or consider themselves aggrieved.

For several days witnesses and accused have been coming in from the neighbouring islands, and last night the village crier proclaimed the share of the feast which each family was called upon to provide. The women have been busy since daylight bringing in yams, plantains and taro from the plantations, while the men were digging the oven and lining it with the stones that when heated will cook the pigs to a turn.

But already the height of the sun shows it to be past ten, and the District Court has to inquire into several charges before the Provincial Court can sit. The order is given to the native police sergeant to beat the 'lali,' and straightway two huge wooden drums boom out their summons to whomever it may concern. As the drum-beats become more agitated and pressing, a long file of aged natives, clad in shirt and 'sulu' of more or less irreproachable white, is seen emerging from the grove of cocoa-nut palms which conceal the village. We have but just time to shake hands with our dusky colleague, a shrewd-looking old man with grizzled hair

and beard carefully trimmed for the occasion, when the crowd begins to pour into the court-house.

The gala dresses are not a little startling. Here is a dignified old gentleman arrayed in a second-hand tunic of a marine, in much the same plight as to buttons as its owner as to teeth; near him stands a fine young village policeman, whose official gravity is not enhanced by the swallow-tailed coat of a nigger minstrel; while the background is taken up by a bevy of village maidens clad in gorgeous velvet pinafores, who are giggling after the manner of their white sisters until they are fixed by the stern grey eye of the chief policeman, which turns their expression into one of that preternatural solemnity they wear in church. The court-house, a native building carpeted with mats, is now packed with natives, sitting cross-legged, only a small place being reserved in front of the table for the accused and witnesses. The magistrate takes his seat, and his scribe, sitting on the floor at his side, prepares his writing materials to record the sentences. The dignity with which the old gentleman adjusts his shirt-collar and clears his throat is a little marred when he produces from his bosom what should have been a pair of pince-nez, seeing that it was secured by a string round his neck, but is in fact a Jew's-harp. With the soft notes of this instrument the man of law is wont to beguile the tedium of a dull case. But, although the spectacle of Lord Coleridge gravely performing on the Jew's-harp in court would at least excite surprise in England, it provokes no smile here. The first case is called on. Reiterated calls for Samuela and Timothe produce two meek-faced youths of eighteen and nineteen who, sitting tailor-fashion before the table, are charged with fowl-stealing. They plead 'Not guilty,' and the owner of the fowls being sworn, deposes that, having been awakened at night by the voice of a favourite hen in angry remonstrance, he ran out of his house, and after a hot chase captured the accused red-handed in two senses, for they were plucking his hen while still alive. Quite unmoved by this tragic tale, Vatureba seems to listen only to the melancholy notes of his Jew's-harp; but the witness is a chief and a man of influence withal, and a period of awed silence follows his accusation, broken only by a subdued twanging from the bench. But Vatureba's eyes are bright and piercing, and they have been fixed for some minutes on the wretched prisoners. He has not yet opened his lips during the case, and as the Jew's-harp is not capable of much expression, it is with some interest we await the

sentence. Suddenly the music ceases, the instrument is withdrawn from the mouth, the oracle is about to speak. Alas, he utters but two words, 'Vula tolu' (three months), and there peals out a malignantly triumphant strain from the Jew's-harp. But the prosecutor starts up with a protest. One of the accused is his nephew, he explains, and he only wished a light sentence to be imposed. Three months for one fowl is so severe; besides, if he has three months, he must go to the central gaol and not work out his sentence in his own district. Again there is silence, and the Jew's-harp has changed from triumph into thoughtful melancholy. At length it is withdrawn, and the oracle speaks again: 'Bogi tolu' (three days).

The prisoners are pounced upon and dragged out by the hungry police, and after a few more cases the District Court is adjourned to make way for the Provincial. The rural police, a fine body of men dressed in uniform, take up positions at the court-house doors, and we take our seats beside our sable colleague at the table. A number of men of lighter colour and different appearance are brought in and placed in a row before the table. These are the leading men of the island of Nathula, who are charged with slandering their Buli (chief of district). They have, in fact, been ruined by a defective knowledge of arithmetic, as we learn from the story of the poor old Buli, whose pathetic and careworn face shows that he at least has not seen the humorous side of the situation. It appears that a sum of 70*l.* due to the natives as a refund on overpaid taxes was given to the Buli for distribution among the various heads of families. For this purpose he summoned a meeting, and the amount in small silver was turned out on the floor to be counted. Now, as not a few Fijians are hazy as to how many shillings go to the pound, it is not surprising that the fourteen or fifteen people who counted the money made totals varying from 50*l.* to 100*l.* They at once jumped to the conclusion that the Buli, who was by this time so bored with the whole thing that he was quite willing to forgo his own share, had embezzled the money; but to make suspicion certainty they started off in a canoe to the mainland to consult a wizard. This oracle, being presented with a whale's tooth, intimated that if he heard the name of the defaulter who had embezzled the money his little finger, and perhaps other portions of his anatomy, would tingle (kida). They accordingly went through the names of all their fellow-villagers, naming the Buli last. On hearing this name the

oracle, whose little finger had hitherto remained normal, 'regardless of grammar, cried out, "That's him!"'

On their return to Nathula they triumphantly quoted the oracle as their authority for accusing their Buli of embezzlement. The poor old gentleman, wounded in his tenderest feelings, had but one resort. He knew *he* hadn't stolen the money, because the money hadn't been stolen at all, but then who would believe his word against that of a wizard? and was not arithmetic itself a supernatural science? There was but one way to re-establish his shattered reputation, and this he took. His canoe was made ready and he repaired to the mainland to consult a rival oracle, named 'Na ivi' (the ivi-tree). The little finger of this seer was positive of the Buli's innocence, so that, fortified by the support of so weighty an authority, he no longer feared to meet his enemies face to face and even to prosecute them for slander. As the Buli was undoubtedly innocent, and had certainly been slandered, the delinquents are reminded that ever since the days of Delphi seers and oracles have met with a very limited success, and are sentenced to three months' imprisonment. And now follows a real tragedy. The consideration enjoyed by the young Fijian is in proportion to the length and cut of his hair. Now these are evidently dandies to the verge of foppishness. Two of them have hair frizzed out so as to make a halo four inches deep round the face, and bleached by lime until it is gradated from deep auburn to a golden yellow at the points. Pounded on and dragged out of court by ruthless policemen, they are handed over to the tender mercies of a pitiless barber, and in a few moments they are as crestfallen and ridiculous as that cockatoo who was plucked by the monkey. The self-assurance of a Fijian is as dependent on the length of his hair as was the strength of Samson.

But now there is a shrill call for Natombe, and a middle-aged man of rather remarkable appearance is brought before the table. He is a mountaineer, and is dressed in a rather dirty sulu of blue calico secured round the waist by a few turns of native bark cloth. He is naked from the waist upward. The charge is practising witchcraft (*drau ni kau*), a crime which is punishable with twelve months' imprisonment and forty lashes, for the Fijians are so persuaded that a bewitched person will die, that it is only necessary to tell a person he is bewitched to ensure his death within a few days from pure fright. The son of the late Buli of Bemana comes forward to prosecute. The substance of his evidence is as follows:

Buli Bemana, who was quite well on a certain Saturday, was taken ill on the Sunday and expired in great agony on the Monday morning. The portion of his people to whom the accused belongs had complained more than once of the Buli's oppression, and desired his removal. It is the custom for a wizard who has compassed the death of a man to appear at the funeral with blackened face as a sign to his employers that he has earned his reward and expects it. The accused attended Buli Bemana's funeral with blackened face. Moreover, an old woman of Bemana had dreamed that she had seen Natombe bewitching the Buli, and the little fingers of several Bemanas had itched unaccountably. These last the witness considered were convincing proofs. The accused, in reply, stated that he was excessively grieved at the Buli's death, and that his face at the funeral was no blacker than usual. Several witnesses followed, who deposed that the accused is celebrated throughout the district for his skill in witchcraft, and that he had boasted openly in days gone by that he had caused the death of a man who died suddenly.

Now, as stated above, the belief in witchcraft among Fijians is so thorough, and the effects of a spell upon the imagination of a bewitched person so fatal, that the English Government has found it necessary to recognise the existence of the practice by law. It is, however, none the less wise for the Government officials, without pooh-pooing the existence of witchcraft, to attempt to discourage the belief in its efficacy. Accordingly we call for evidence as to the particular manner in which the alleged spell was cast. There was no cauldron nor blasted heath in this case; indeed, the whole ceremony was a decidedly tame affair. It was only necessary to procure some of the Buli's hair or the portions of his food left untasted and bury them with certain herbs inclosed in a bamboo, and death would ensue in a few days. To our question whether the Buli himself thought he was bewitched we receive a decided negative; indeed, we happen to know that the poor old man died of acute dysentery brought on by cold, and that in this case, if witchcraft had been really practised, the death was a most unfortunate coincidence. As no evidence more incriminating than dreams and the finger-tingling is forthcoming, the accused is acquitted, to be condemned by the other tribunal of public opinion, which evidently runs high. When he has left the court we address the chiefs of Bemana upon the subject of witchcraft generally, as if seeking information. Upon this a number of

white-haired old gentlemen, whose boredom has been for some time exchanged for somnolence, wake up and hold forth upon the relative value of hair and nail-parings as instruments for casting spells. While the discussion becomes animated and the consensus of opinion appears to be gathering in favour of toe-nails, we electrify the assembly by suggesting an experiment. They are to select two of their wisest wizards, we are to supply the necessary means, and they are to forthwith cast their most potent spell over us. On the result is to rest their future belief in witchcraft. If we have not succumbed in a month's time there is no truth in the practice. If we do die, they may not only believe in it, but they will, of course, be held guiltless of our death. A dead silence ensues. Then, after much whispered conversation, an old man addresses the Court, pointing out that white men eat different food from Fijians, for do they not live upon flour, tinned meat, rice and other abominations? And do they not despise the succulent yam, and turn up their noses at pork, dried lizard, and tender snake? Therefore is it not obvious that the powers of witchcraft will be lost upon such beings? Now we have with us a Tongan servant, by name Lijiate (being the nearest Tongans can get to Richard). This man, being half-educated and above all a Tongan, is full of contempt for Fijians and their barbarous customs. He has long talked contemptuously of witchcraft, which he considers fit only for the credence of heathens, not of good Christians like himself. Here is a chance for Richard to distinguish himself and us. We make the offer. Richard is to be bewitched on the same terms as ourselves. He at least does eat yams and pork, and though he has not yet taken kindly to snake, the difference is trifling. But we have counted without our host. 'Fakamolemole' (pardon), says Richard, 'I almost believe in it myself. I pray you have me excused.' This spikes our gun, for though, doubtless, some of our Fijian servants would consent to be experimented on, they would probably pine away and die from pure fright, and re-establish the belief in witchcraft for ever.

Our discomfiture is best covered by attention to business. Two more cases of larceny are heard and disposed of, and now two ancient dames, clad in borrowed plumes, consisting of calico petticoat and pinafore, are led before the table. Grey-headed and toothless, dim as to sight and shapeless as to features, they look singularly out of place in a court of law. Time was (and not so very long ago) when women so decrepit as these would have had

to make way for a more vigorous generation by the simple and expeditious means of being buried alive, but now they no longer fear the consequences of their eccentricities. One of these old women is the prosecutrix, and the charge is assault. We ask which is the prosecutrix, and immediately one holds out and brandishes a hand from which one of the fingers has been almost severed by a bite. She has altogether the most lugubrious expression that features such as hers can assume, but with the bitten finger now permanently hung out like a signboard, words of complaint are superfluous. The other has a truculent and forbidding expression. She snaps out her answers as if she had bitten off the ends like the prosecutrix' finger, and shuts her mouth like a steel trap. The quarrel which led to their appearance in court might have taken place in Seven Dials. Defendant said something disparaging about prosecutrix' daughter. Prosecutrix retaliated by damaging references to defendant's son, and left the house hurriedly to enjoy the luxury of having had last word. Defendant followed and searched the village for her with the avowed intention of skinning her alive. They met at last, and having each called the other a-roasted-corpse-fit-for-the-oven, they fell to with the result to the prosecutrix' finger already described. The mountain dialect used in evidence is almost unintelligible to us, so that our admonition, couched in the Bauan, has to be translated (with additions) by our native colleague. But our eloquence was all wasted. Defendant utterly declines to express contrition. Our last resource must be employed, and we inform her that if she does not complete the task imposed on her as a fine she will be sent to Suva Gaol, there to be confined with the Indian women. This awful threat has its effect, and the dread powers of our court having thus been vindicated the crier proclaims its adjournment for three months. The spectators troop out to spend the rest of the day in gossiping about the delinquents and their cases. The men who have been sentenced are already at work weeding round the court-house, subjects for the breathless interest and pity of the bevy of girls who have just emerged from court and are exchanging whispered comments upon the alteration in a good-looking man when his hair is cut off. None are left in the court-house but ourselves, the chiefs, and the older men. The table is removed, and the room cleared of the paraphernalia of civilisation. Enter two men bearing a large carved wooden bowl, a bucket of water, and a root of 'yagona,' which is

presented to us ceremoniously, and handed back to some young men at the bottom of the room to chew. Meanwhile conversation becomes general, witchcraft is discussed in all its branches, and compassion is expressed for the poor sceptical white man; 'sulukas' (cigarettes rolled in banana leaves) are lighted; the chewed masses of 'yagona' root are thrown into the bowl, mixed with water, kneaded, strained, and handed to each person according to his rank to drink; tongues are loosened, and it is time to draw the meeting to a close. The sun is fast dipping into the western sea when the last of our guests leaves us, and we have a long moonlight ride before us. There is but just time to pack up our traps and have a hasty meal before we are left in darkness, but the moon will rise in an hour, so we may start in safety in pursuit of the train of police and convicts who are carrying the baggage.

LADY BETTY'S INDISCRETION.

‘HORRY! I am sick to death of it!’

There was a servant in the room gathering the tea-cups; but Lady Betty Stafford, having been brought up in the purple, was not to be deterred from speaking her mind by a servant. Her cousin was either more prudent or less vivacious; he did not answer on the instant, but stood looking through one of the windows at the leafless trees and slow-dropping rain in the Mall, and only turned when Lady Betty pettishly repeated her statement.

‘Had a bad time?’ he then vouchsafed, dropping into a chair near her, and looking first at her, in a good-natured way, and then at his boots, which he seemed to approve.

‘Horrid!’ she replied.

‘Many people here?’

‘Hordes of them! Whole tribes!’ she exclaimed. She was a little lady, plump and pretty, with a pale, clear complexion, and bright eyes. ‘I am bored beyond belief. And—and I have not seen Stafford since morning,’ she added.

‘Cabinet council?’

‘Yes!’ she answered viciously. ‘A cabinet council, and a privy council, and a board of trade, and a board of green cloth, and all the other boards! Horry, I am sick to death of it! What is the use of it all?’

‘Country go to the dogs!’ he said oracularly, still admiring his boots.

‘Let it!’ she retorted, not relenting a whit. ‘I wish it would; I wish the dogs joy of it!’

He made an extraordinary effort at diffuseness. ‘I thought,’ he said, ‘that you were becoming political, Betty. Going to write something, and all that.’

‘Rubbish! But here is Mr. Atley. Mr. Atley, will you have a cup of tea?’ she continued, speaking to the new-comer. ‘There will be some here presently. Where is Mr. Stafford?’

‘Mr. Stafford will take a cup of tea in the library, Lady Betty,’ replied the secretary. ‘He asked me to bring it to him. He is copying an important paper.’

Sir Horace forsook his boots, and in a fit of momentary interest asked, 'They have come to terms?'

The secretary nodded. Lady Betty said 'Pshaw!' A man brought in the fresh teapot. The next moment Mr. Stafford himself came quickly into the room, an open telegram in his hand.

He nodded pleasantly to his wife and her cousin. But his thin, dark face wore—it generally did—a preoccupied look. Country people to whom he was pointed out in the streets called him, according to their political leanings, either insignificant, or a prig, or a 'dry sort;' or sometimes said, 'How young he is!' But those whose fate it was to face the Minister in the House knew that there was something in him more to be feared even than his imperturbability, his honesty, or his precision—and that was a certain sudden warmth, which was apt to carry away the House at unexpected times. On one of these occasions, it was rumoured, Lady Betty Champion had seen him, and fallen in love with him. Why he had thrown the handkerchief to her—well that was another matter; and whether the apparently incongruous match would answer—that, too, remained to be seen.

'More telegrams?' she cried now. 'It rains telegrams! how I hate them!'

'Why?' he said. 'Why should you?' He really wondered.

She made a face at him. 'Here is your tea,' she said abruptly.

'Thank you; you are very good,' he replied. He took the cup and set it down absently. 'Atley,' he continued, speaking to the secretary, 'you have not corrected the report of my speech at the Club, have you? No, I know you have had no time. Will you run your eye over it presently, and see if it is all right, and send it to the 'Times'—I do not think I need see it—by eleven o'clock at latest. The editor,' he added, tapping the pink paper in his hand, 'seemed to doubt us. I have to go to Fitzgerald's now, so you must copy Lord Pilgrimstone's terms, too, please. I had meant to do it myself, but I shall be with you before you have finished.'

'What are the terms?' Lady Betty asked. 'Lord Pilgrimstone has not agreed to——'

'To permit me to communicate them?' he replied, with a grave smile. 'No. So you must pardon me, my dear, I have passed my word for absolute secrecy. And, indeed, it is as important to me as to Pilgrimstone that they should not be divulged.'

'They are sure to leak out,' she retorted. 'They always do.'

'Well, it will not be through me, I hope.'

She stamped her foot on the carpet. 'I should like to get them, and send them to the "Times"!' she exclaimed, her eyes flashing—he was so provoking! 'And let all the world know them! I should!'

He looked his astonishment, while the other two laughed softly, partly to avoid embarrassment, perhaps. My Lady often said these things, and no one took them seriously.

'You had better play the secretary for once, Lady Betty,' said Atley, who was related to his chief. 'You will then be able to satisfy your curiosity. Shall I resign *pro tem.*?'

She looked eagerly at her husband for the third part of a second—looked for assent, perhaps. But she read no playfulness in his face, and her own fell. He was thinking about other things. 'No,' she said, almost sullenly, dropping her eyes to the carpet; 'I should not spell well enough.'

Soon after that they dispersed, this being Wednesday, Mr. Stafford's day for dining out. Every one knows that Ministers dine only twice a week in session—on Wednesday and Sunday; and Sunday is often sacred to the children where there are any, lest they should grow up and not know their father by sight. Lady Betty came into the library at a quarter to eight, and found her husband still at his desk, a pile of papers before him waiting for his signature. As a fact, he had only just sat down, displacing his secretary, who had gone upstairs to dress.

'Stafford!' she said.

She did not seem quite at her ease, but his mind was troubled, and he failed to notice this. 'Yes, my dear,' he answered politely, shuffling the papers before him into a heap. He knew he was late, and he could see that she was dressed. 'Yes, I am going upstairs this minute. I have not forgotten.'

'It is not that,' she said, leaning with one hand on the table; 'I want to ask you——'

'My dear, you really must tell it me in the carriage.' He was on his feet already, making some hasty preparations. 'Where are we to dine? At the Duke's? Then we shall have nearly a mile to drive. Will not that do for you?' He was working hard while he spoke. There was a great oak post-box within reach, and another box for letters which were to be delivered by hand, and he was thrusting a handful of notes into each of these. Other

packets he swept into different drawers of the table. Still standing, he stooped and signed his name to half a dozen letters, which he left open on the blotting-pad. 'Atley will see to these when he is dressed,' he murmured. 'Would you oblige me by locking the drawers, my dear—it will save me a minute—and giving me the keys when I come down?'

He went off then, two or three papers in his hand, and almost ran upstairs. Lady Betty stood a moment on the spot on which he had left her, looking in an odd way—just as if it were new to her—round the grave, spacious room, with its sombre Spanish-leather-covered furniture, its ponderous writing-tables and shelves of books, its three lofty curtained windows. When her eyes at last came back to the lamp, and dwelt on it, they were very bright, and her face was flushed. Her foot could be heard tapping on the carpet. Presently she remembered herself and fell to work, vehemently slamming such drawers as were open, and locking them.

The private secretary found her doing this when he came in. She muttered something—still stooping with her face over the drawers—and almost immediately went out. He looked after her, partly because there was something odd in her manner—she kept her face averted; and partly because she was wearing a new and striking gown, and he admired her; and he noticed, as she passed through the doorway, that she had some papers held down by her side. But, of course, he thought nothing of this.

He was hopelessly late for his own dinner-party, and only stayed a moment to slip the letters just signed into envelopes prepared for them. Then he made hastily for the door, opened it, and came into abrupt collision with Sir Horace, who was strolling in.

'Beg pardon!' said that gentleman, with irritating placidity. 'Late for dinner?'

'Rather!' cried the secretary, trying to get round him.

'Well,' drawled the other, 'which is the hand-box, old fellow?'

'It has just been cleared. Here, give it me. The messenger is in the hall now.'

And Atley snatched the letter from his companion, the two going out into the hall together. Marcus, the butler, a couple of tall footmen, and the messenger were sorting letters at the table. 'Here, Marcus,' said the secretary, pitching his letter on the slab, 'let that go with the others. And is my hansom here?'

In another minute he was speeding one way, and the Staffords in their brougham another, while Sir Horace walked at his leisure down to his club. The Minister and his wife drove along in silence, for he forgot to ask her what she wanted; and, strange to say, Lady Betty forgot to tell him. At the party she made quite a sensation; never had she seemed more recklessly gay, more piquant, more audaciously witty, than she showed herself this evening. There were illustrious personages present, but they paled beside her. The Duke, with whom she was a great favourite, laughed at her sallies until he could laugh no more; and even her husband, her very husband, forgot for a time the country and the crisis, and listened, half-proud and half-afraid. But she was not aware of this; she could not see his face where she was sitting. To all seeming she never looked that way. She was quite a model society wife.

Mr. Stafford himself was an early riser. It was his habit to be up by six; to make his own coffee over a spirit lamp, and then not only to get through much work in his dressing-room, but to take his daily ride also before breakfast. On the morning after the Duke's party, however, he lay later than usual; and as there was more business to be done—owing to the crisis—the canter in the Park had to be omitted. He was still among his papers—though momentarily awaiting the breakfast-gong, when a hansom cab driven at full speed stopped at the door. He glanced up wearily as he heard the doors of the cab flung open with a crash. There had been a time when the stir and bustle of such arrivals had been sweet to him—not so sweet as to some, for he had never been deeply in love with the parade of office—but sweeter than to-day, when they were no more to him than the creaking of the mill to the camel that turns it blindfold and in darkness.

Naturally he was thinking of Lord Pilgrimstone this morning, and guessed, before he opened the note which the servant brought in to him, who was its writer. But its contents had, nevertheless, an electrical effect upon him. His brow reddened. With a quite unusual display of emotion he sprang to his feet, crushing the fragment of paper in his fingers. 'Who brought this?' he asked sharply. 'Who brought it?' he repeated, before the servant could explain.

The man had never seen him so moved. 'Mr. Scratchley, sir,' he answered.

'Ha! Then, show him into the library,' was the quick reply.

And while the servant went to do his bidding, the Minister hastily changed his dressing-gown for a coat, and ran down a private staircase, reaching the room he had mentioned by one door as Mr. Scratchley, Lord Pilgrimstone's secretary, entered it through another.

By that time he had regained his composure, and looked much as usual. Still, when he held up the crumpled note, there was a brusqueness in the gesture which would have surprised his ordinary acquaintances, and did remind Mr. Scratchley of certain 'warm nights' in the House. 'You know the contents of this, Mr. Scratchley?' he said without prelude, and in a tone which matched his gesture.

The visitor bowed. He was a grave middle-aged man, who seemed oppressed and burdened by the load of cares and responsibilities which his smiling chief carried so jauntily. People said that he was the proper complement of Lord Pilgrimstone, as the more volatile Atley was of his leader.

'And you are aware,' continued Mr. Stafford, still more harshly, 'that Lord Pilgrimstone gives yesterday's agreement to the winds?'

'I have never seen his lordship so deeply moved,' replied the discreet one.

'He says: "Our former negotiation was ruined by premature talk, but this last disclosure can only be referred to treachery or gross carelessness." What does this mean? I know of no disclosure, Mr. Scratchley. I must have an explanation, and you, I presume, are here to give me one.'

For a moment the other seemed taken aback. 'You have not seen the "Times?"' he murmured.

'This morning's? No. But it is here.'

He snatched it, as he spoke, from a table at his elbow, and unfolded it. The secretary approached and pointed to the head of a column—the most conspicuous, the column most readily to be found in the paper. 'They are crying it at every street corner I passed,' he added apologetically. 'There is nothing to be heard in St. James's Street and Pall Mall but "Detailed Programme of the Coalition." The other dailies are striking off second editions to contain it!'

Mr. Stafford's eyes were riveted to the paper, and there was a long pause, a pause on his part of dismay and consternation. He could scarcely—to repeat a common phrase—believe his eyes. 'It

seems,' he muttered at length, 'it seems fairly accurate—a tolerably precise account, indeed.'

'It is a verbatim copy,' said the secretary dryly. 'The question is, who furnished it. Lord Pilgrimstone, I am authorised to say, has not permitted his note of the agreement to pass out of his possession—even up to the present moment.'

'And so he concludes'—the Minister said thoughtfully—'it is a fair inference enough, perhaps—that the "Times" must have procured its information from my note?'

'No!' the secretary objected sharply and forcibly. 'It is not a matter of inference, Mr. Stafford. I am directed to say that. I have inquired, early as it is, at the "Times" office, and learned that the copy printed came directly from the hands of your messenger.'

'Of my messenger!' Mr. Stafford cried, thunderstruck. 'You are sure of that?'

'I am sure that the sub-editor says so.'

And again there was silence. 'This must be looked into,' said Mr. Stafford at length, controlling himself by an effort. 'For the present, I agree with Lord Pilgrimstone, that it alters the position—and perhaps finally.'

'Lord Pilgrimstone will be damaged in the eyes of a large section of his supporters—seriously damaged,' said Mr. Scratchley, shaking his head, and frowning.

'Possibly. From every point of view the thing is to be deplored. But I will call on Lord Pilgrimstone,' continued the Minister, 'after lunch. Will you tell him so?'

A curious embarrassment showed itself in the secretary's manner. He twisted his hat in his hands, and looked suddenly sick and sad—as if he were about to join in the groan at a prayer-meeting. 'Lord Pilgrimstone,' he said, in a voice he vainly strove to render commonplace, 'is going to the Sandown Spring Meeting to-day.'

The tone was really so lugubrious—to say nothing of a shake of the head with which he could not help accompanying the statement—that a faint smile played on Mr. Stafford's lip. 'Then I must take the next possible opportunity. I will see him to-morrow.'

Mr. Scratchley assented to that, and bowed himself out, after another word or two, looking more gloomy and careworn than usual. The interview had not been altogether to his mind. He

wished now that he had spoken more roundly to Mr. Stafford; perhaps even asked for a categorical denial of the charge. But the Minister's manner had overawed him. He had found it impossible to put the question. And then the pitiful degrading confession he had had to make for Lord Pilgrimstone! That had put the coping-stone to his dissatisfaction.

'Oh!' sighed Mr. Scratchley, as he stepped into his cab. 'Oh, that men so great should stoop to things so little!'

It did not occur to him that there is a condition of things even more sad: when little men meddle with great things.

Meanwhile Mr. Stafford, left alone, stood at the window deep in unpleasant thoughts, from which the entrance of the butler sent to summon him to breakfast first aroused him. 'Stay a moment, Marcus!' he said, turning with a sigh, as the man was leaving the room after doing his errand. 'I want to ask you a question. Did you make up the messenger's bag last evening?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Did you notice a letter addressed to the "Times" office?'

The servant had prepared himself to cogitate. But he found it unnecessary. 'Yes, sir,' he replied smartly. 'Two.'

'Two?' repeated Mr. Stafford, dismay in his tone, though this was just what he had reason to expect.

'Yes, sir. There was one I took from the hand-box, and one Mr. Atley gave me in the hall at the last moment,' explained the butler.

'Ha! Thank you, Marcus. Then ask Mr. Atley if he will kindly come to me. No doubt he will be able to tell me what I want to know.'

The words were commonplace, but the speaker's anxiety was so evident that Marcus when he delivered the message—which he did with all haste—added a word or two of warning. 'It is about a letter to the "Times," sir, I think. Mr. Stafford seemed a good deal put out,' he said, confidentially.

'Indeed?' Atley replied. 'I will go down.' And he started at once. But before he reached the library he met someone. Lady Betty looked out of the breakfast-room, and saw him descending the stairs with the butler behind him.

'Where is Mr. Stafford, Marcus?' she asked impatiently, as she stood with her hand on the door. 'Good morning, Mr. Atley,' she added, her eyes descending to him. 'Where is my husband? The coffee is getting quite cold.'

'He has just sent to ask me to come to him,' Atley answered. 'Marcus tells me there is something in the "Times" which has annoyed him, Lady Betty; I will send him up as quickly as I can.'

But Lady Betty had not stayed to receive this last assurance. She had drawn back and shut the door smartly; yet not so quickly but that the private secretary had seen her change colour. 'Umph!' he ejaculated to himself—the lady was not much given to blushing as a rule—I wonder what is wrong with *her* this morning. She is not generally rude—to me.'

It was not long before he got some light on the matter. 'Come here, Atley,' said his employer, the moment he entered the library. 'Look at this!'

The secretary took the 'Times,' folded back at the important column, and read the letter. Meanwhile the Minister read the secretary. He saw surprise and consternation on his face, but no trace of guilt. Then he told him what Marcus said about the two letters which had gone the previous evening from the house addressed to the 'Times' office. 'One,' he said, 'contained the notes of my speech. The other——'

'The other——' replied the secretary, thinking while he spoke, 'was given to me at the last moment by Sir Horace. I threw it to Marcus in the hall.'

'Ah!' said his chief, trying very hard to express nothing by the exclamation, but not quite succeeding. 'Did you see that that letter was addressed to the editor of the "Times"?''

The secretary reddened, and betrayed sudden confusion. 'I did,' he said hurriedly. 'I saw so much of the address as I threw the letter on the slab—though I thought nothing of it at the time.'

Mr. Stafford looked at him fixedly. 'Come,' he said, 'this is a grave matter, Atley. You noticed, I can see, the handwriting. Was it Sir Horace's?'

'No,' replied the secretary.

'Whose was it?'

'I think—I think, Mr. Stafford—that it was Lady Betty's. But I should be sorry, having seen it only for a moment—to say for certain.'

'Lady Betty's?'

Mr. Stafford repeated the exclamation three times, in pure surprise, in anger, a third time in trembling. In this last stage

he walked away to the window, and turning his back on his companion looked out. He recalled at once his wife's petulant exclamation of yesterday, the foolish desire expressed, as he had supposed in jest. Had she really been in earnest? And had she carried out her threat? Had she—his wife—done this thing so compromising to his honour, so mischievous to the country, so mad, reckless, wicked? Impossible. It was impossible. And yet—and yet Atley was a man to be trusted, a gentleman, his own relation! And Atley's eye was not likely to be deceived in a matter of handwriting. That Atley had made up his mind he could see.

The statesman turned from the window, and walked to and fro, his agitation betrayed by his step. The third time he passed in front of his secretary—who had riveted his eyes to the 'Times' and appeared to be reading the money article—he stopped. 'If this be true—mind I say if, Atley—' he cried, jerkily, 'what was my wife's motive? I am in the dark! blindfolded! Help me! Tell me what has been passing round me that I have not seen. You would not have my wife—a spy?'

'No! no! no!' cried the other, as he dropped the paper, his vehemence and his working features showing that he felt the pathos of the appeal. 'It is not that. Lady Betty is jealous, if I may venture to judge, of your devotion to politics. She sees little of you. You are wrapped up in public affairs and matters of state. She feels herself neglected and set aside. And she has been married no more than a year.'

'But she has her society,' objected the Minister, compelling himself to speak calmly, 'and her cousin, and—and many other things.'

'For which she does not care,' returned the secretary.

It was a simple answer, but something in it touched a tender place. Mr. Stafford winced and cast a queer startled look at the speaker. Before he could reply, however—if he intended to reply—a knock came at the door and Marcus put in his head. 'My lady is waiting breakfast, sir,' he suggested timidly. What could a poor butler do between an impatient mistress and an obdurate master?

'I will come,' said Mr. Stafford hastily. 'I will come at once. For this matter, Atley,' he continued when the door was closed again, 'let it rest for the present where it is. I am aware I can depend upon your—' he paused, seeking a word—'your discretion,

One thing is certain however. There is an end of the arrangement made yesterday. Probably the Queen will send for Templetown. I shall see Lord Pilgrimstone to-morrow, but probably that will be the end of it.'

Atley went away marvelling at his coolness; trying to retrace the short steps of their conversation, and so to discern how far the Minister had gone with him, and where he had turned off upon a resolution of his own. He failed to see the clue however, and marvelled still more as the day went on and others succeeded it; days of political crisis. Out of doors the world, or that little jot of it which has its centre at Westminster, was in confusion. The newspapers, morning or evening, found ready sale, and had no need of recourse to murder-panics, or prurient discussions. The Coalition scandal, the resignation of Ministers, the sending for Lord This and Mr. That, the certainty of a dissolution, provided matter enough. In all this Atley found nothing to wonder at. He had seen it all before. That which did cause him surprise was the calm—the unnatural calm as it seemed to him—which prevailed in the house in Carlton Terrace. For a day or two, indeed, there was much going to and fro, much closeting and button-holing; for rather longer the secretary read anxiety and apprehension in one countenance—Lady Betty's. But things settled down. The knocker presently found peace, such comparative peace as falls to knockers in Carlton Terrace. Lady Betty's brow grew clear as her eye found no reflection of its anxiety in Mr. Stafford's face. In a word the secretary failed to discern the faintest sign of domestic trouble.

The late Minister indeed was taking things with wonderful coolness. Lord Pilgrimstone had failed to taunt him, and the triumph of old foes had failed to goad him into a last effort. Apparently it had occurred to him that the country might for a time exist without him. He was standing aside with a shade on his face, and there were rumours that he would take a long holiday.

A week saw all these things happen. And then, one day as Atley sat writing in the library—Mr. Stafford being out—Lady Betty came into the room for something. Rising to find her what she wanted, he was holding the door open for her to pass out, when she paused.

'Shut the door, Mr. Atley,' she said, pointing to it. 'I want to ask you a question.'

'Pray do, Lady Betty,' he answered.

'It is this,' she said, meeting his eyes boldly—and a brighter, a more dainty little creature than she looked then had seldom tempted man. 'Mr. Stafford's resignation—had it anything, Mr. Atley, to do with'—her face coloured a very little—'something that was in the "Times" this day week?'

His own cheek coloured violently enough. 'If ever,' he was saying to himself, 'I meddle or mar between husband and wife again, may I——' But aloud he answered quietly, 'Something perhaps.' The question was sudden. Her eyes were on his face. He found it impossible to prevaricate. 'Something perhaps,' he said.

'My husband has never spoken to me about it,' she replied, breathing quickly.

He bowed, having no words adapted to the situation. But he repeated his resolution (as above) more furiously.

'He has never appeared even aware of it,' she persisted. 'Are you sure that he saw it?'

He wondered at her innocence, or her audacity. That such a baby should do so much mischief. The thought irritated him. 'It was impossible that he should not see it, Lady Betty,' he said, with a touch of asperity. 'Quite impossible!'

'Ah,' she replied with a faint sigh. 'Well, he has never spoken to me about it. And you think it had really something to do with his resignation, Mr. Atley?'

'Most certainly,' he said. He was not inclined to spare her this time.

She nodded thoughtfully, and then with a quiet 'Thank you, went out.

'Well,' muttered the secretary to himself when the door was fairly shut behind her, 'she is—upon my word she is a fool! And he'—appealing to the inkstand—'he has never said a word to her about it. He is a new Don Quixote! a second Job! a new Sir Isaac Newton! I do not know what to call him!'

It was Sir Horace, however, who precipitated the catastrophe. He happened to come in about tea-time that afternoon, before, in fact, my lady had had an opportunity of seeing her husband. He found her alone and in a brown study, a thing most unusual with her and portending something. He watched her for a time in silence; seemed to draw courage from a still longer inspection of his boots, and then said, 'So the cart is clean over, Betty?'

She nodded.

'Driver much hurt?'

'Do you mean, does Stafford mind it?' she replied impatiently.

He nodded.

'Well, I do not know. It is hard to say.'

'Think so?' he persisted.

'Good gracious, Horry!' my lady retorted, losing patience, 'I say I do not know, and you say "Think so!" If you want to learn so particularly, ask him yourself. Here he is!'

Mr. Stafford had just entered the room. Perhaps she really wished to satisfy herself as to the state of his feelings. Perhaps she only desired in her irritation to put her cousin in a corner. At any rate she coolly turned to her husband and said, 'Here is Horace wishing to know if you mind being turned out much?'

Mr. Stafford's face flushed a little at the home-thrust which no one else would have dared to deal him. But he showed no displeasure. 'Well, not so much as I should have thought,' he answered frankly, pausing to weigh a lump of sugar, and, as it seemed, his feelings. 'There are compensations you know.'

'Pity all the same those terms came out,' grunted Sir Horace.

'It was.'

'Stafford!' Lady Betty struck in on a sudden, speaking fast and eagerly, 'is it true, I want to ask you, is it true that that led you to resign?'

Naturally he was startled, and even showed that he was. She was the last person whom he had expected to ask that question, but his long training in self-control stood him in good stead.

'Well, yes,' he said quietly.

It was better, he was thinking, indeed it was only right, that she should know what she had done. But he did not look at her.

'Was it only that?' she asked again.

This time he weighed his answer. He thought her persistency odd. But again he assented.

'Yes,' he said gravely. 'Only that, I think. But for that I should have remained in—with Lord Pilgrimstone of course. Perhaps things are better as they are, my dear.'

Lady Betty sprang from her seat with all her old vivacity. 'Well!' she cried, 'well, I am sure! Then why, I should like to know, did Mr. Atley tell me that my letter to the "Times" had something to do with it!'

'Did not say so,' quoth Sir Horace. 'Absurd!'

'Yes, he did,' cried Lady Betty, so fiercely that the rash speaker, who had returned to his boots, fairly shook in them. 'You were not there! How do you know?'

'Don't know,' admitted Sir Horace meekly.

'But stay, stay a moment!' said Mr. Stafford, getting in a word with difficulty. It was strange if his wife could talk so calmly of her misdeeds, and before a third party too. 'What letter to the "Times" did Atley mean?'

'My letter about the Women's League,' she explained earnestly. 'You did not see it? No, I thought not. But Mr. Atley would have it that you had, and that it had something to do with your going out. Horace told me at the time that I ought not to send it without consulting you. But I did, because you said you could not be bothered with it—I mean you said you were busy, Stafford. And so I thought I would ask if it had done any harm, and Mr. Atley— What is the matter, Stafford?' she cried, breaking off sharply at sight of the change in his face. 'Did it do harm?'

'No, no,' he answered. 'Only I never heard of this letter before. What made you write it?'

'Well,' said Lady Betty, while she coloured violently, and became on a sudden very shy—like most young authors, 'I wanted to be in the—in the swim with you, don't you know.'

Mr. Stafford murmured 'Oh!'

Thanks to his talk with Atley he read the secret of that sudden shyness. And confusion poured over him more and more. It caused him to give way to impulse in a manner which a moment's reflection would have led him to avoid.

'Then it was not you,' he exclaimed unwarily, 'who sent Pilgrimstone's terms to the "Times"?''

'I?' she exclaimed in an indescribable tone, and with eyes like saucers. 'I?' she repeated.

'Gad!' cried Sir Horace; and looked about for a way of escape.

'I?' she continued, struggling between wrath and wonder. 'I betray you to the "Times"! And you thought so, Stafford?'

Then there was silence in the room for a moment—a long moment during which the cool, imperturbable statesman, the hard man of the world, did not know where to turn his eyes. 'There were circumstances—several circumstances,' he muttered at last, 'which made—which forced me to think so.'

'And Mr. Atley thought so?' she asked. He nodded. 'Oh, that tame cat!' she cried, her eyes flashing.

Then she seemed to meditate while her husband gazed at her, a prey to conflicting emotions, and Sir Horace made himself as small as possible. 'I see,' she continued presently in a different tone. 'Only—only if you thought that, why did you never say anything! Why did you not scold me, beat me, Stafford? I do not—I do not understand.'

'I thought,' he explained in despair—he had so mismanaged matters—'that perhaps I had left you—out of the swim, as you call it, Betty. That I had not treated you very well, and after all it might be my own fault.'

'And you said nothing! You intended to say nothing?'

He nodded.

'Gad!' cried Sir Horace very softly.

But Lady Betty said nothing. She turned after a long look at her husband, and went straight out of the room, her eyes wet with tears. The two men heard her pause a moment on the landing, and then flit upstairs and shut her door. But her foot, even to their gross ears, seemed to touch the stairs as if it loved them, and there was a happy lingering in the very slamming of the door.

They looked, when she had left them, anywhere but at one another. Sir Horace sought inspiration in his boots, and presently found it. 'Wonder who did it, then?' he burst out at last.

'Ah! I wonder,' replied the ex-Minister, descending at a bound from the rosy, tumbled cloudland to which his thoughts had borne him. 'I never pushed the inquiry; you know why now. But they should be able to enlighten us at the "Times" office. We could learn in whose handwriting the copy was, at any rate. It is not well to have spies about us.'

'I can tell you in whose handwriting they say it was,' said Sir Horace bluntly.

'In whose?'

'In Atley's.'

Mr. Stafford did not look surprised. Instead of answering he thought. And the result was that he presently left the room in silence. When he came back he had a copy of the 'Times' in his hand, and his face wore a look of perplexity. 'I have read the riddle,' he said, 'and yet it is a riddle to me still. I never found

time before to read the report of my speech at the Club. It occurred to me to look at it now. It is full of errors, so full that it is clear the printer had not the corrected proof Atley prepared. Therefore I conclude that Atley's copy of the terms went to the "Times" instead of the speech. But how was the mistake made?'

'That is the question.'

Happily the private secretary came into the room at this juncture. 'Atley,' Mr. Stafford said at once, 'I want you. Carry your mind back a week—to this day week. Are you sure that you sent the report of my speech at the Club to the "Times"?'

'Am I sure?' replied the other confidently, nothing daunted by being so abruptly challenged. 'I am quite sure I did, sir. I remember the circumstances. I found the report—it was type-written you remember—lying on the blotting-pad when I came down dressed for dinner. I slipped it into an envelope, and put it in the box. I can see myself doing it now.'

'But how do you know that it was the report you put in the envelope?'

'You had indorsed it "Corrected report.—W. Stafford," replied Atley triumphantly.

'Ah!' said Mr. Stafford, dropping his hands and eyes and sitting down suddenly, 'I remember! My wife came in, and—yes, my wife came in.'

THE HUNDRED GATES.

A DREAM OF BAD BOOKS.

My friend Timson, of the Psychical Society, is peculiarly successful in the matter of dreams. For years they have gone on in an ascending ratio; each one is more vivid than the last, and fulfilled in more detail. There are some people who consider that Timson overdoes it a little, that he rides his nightmares too hard. Tastes differ as to the proportion of untrustworthy narrative which a man may introduce about himself into the general conversation; and when a man has three distinct dreams in one night, and relates them all at one dinner on the following evening, he does lay himself open to a certain amount of criticism. But Timson is no ordinary man, and cannot be judged by ordinary standards. He lives in a haunted house, his wife is a medium, and he numbers among his intimate acquaintance several fascinating people who have positively seen with their bodily eyes things unspeakable. His extensive leisure is spent entirely in researches of the deepest and most psychical character, and though you may be thankless enough to find him a little wearisome, you must at least own that he is an authority in his special subject. In fact, what Timson does not know, or think he knows, about the unseen world is hardly worth the knowing.

Yet when, a few months ago, I took Timson a dream from which I had recently suffered, he proved most unsatisfactory. I related it to him partly to repay him for the many wicked falsehoods he must have told me at different times about himself, but chiefly because I thought that Timson's great knowledge of this subject would enable him to give me some explanation and advice. In the latter point I was wrong. Timson is an exponent of the scientific method, which does not explain but classifies. In my case he refused even to classify definitely. I could get little from him except some criticism on parts of my story. I may possibly have offended him by something in my manner which he mistook for levity, but it appeared that the fatal objection was that my dream had not come true, and never could come true, and was therefore not worth consideration. Now, although

admitting the fact, I took exception to his deductions from it. I pointed out to him that I was only a beginner, and that if I were encouraged I should soon acquire the right knack; that, besides, a dream which did not come true must be more startling to him than the other kind. But my arguments were of no use; he positively refused to classify my story in its present incomplete condition, although he owned that if it ever did come true it would rank as an aggravated case of inverted telepathy. I do hope it is not going to be as bad as that, and I told Timson so. I feel that I could not bear it. I entreated him to tell me if he thought that a few weeks at the seaside, or riding exercise, or a generous diet, would do anything to avert disaster. But at this point the oracle had the misfortune to lose its temper, and insisted that I was not being serious with it. So I obtained no further information.

In laying my dream before the unscientific public I must request them not to fall into Timson's error of imagining that I would trifle with them. I account for it myself in this way. A month before I had been confined to my room for several days with a sprained ankle, and during that period I had been supplied by my friends with light literature. I dare say they meant it well, but if I should ever again be afflicted with a sprained ankle, I will either take it plain, or I will choose the light literature myself.

The first distinct sensation that occurred to me after falling asleep was that I had started to take a nice long walk in the country. I had passed through Putney, across Wimbledon Common, and into a shady lane, and I was feeling duller and duller with every step that took me further from London and civilisation. I am always sorry for the poor people who live all the year round in the country. How many poor children there must be amid our rustic lanes and hedgerows who will pass their whole lives without ever having seen the interior of an omnibus or the exterior of a sandwich-man! While I was occupied with such sad thoughts, I was suddenly surprised by seeing before me a large square field the sides of which were composed almost entirely of wooden gates, there being only a yard or two of low hedge in between each. One of these gates was rather higher than the rest, and seemed to form the principal entrance. This was unoccupied, but on each of the others there was one person seated. I stood still and counted them. There were a hundred

gates in all, twenty-five on each side. For some moments I hesitated. Curiosity advised me to inquire the reason for this phenomenon. It would be absurd to suppose that a field would wantonly have a hundred gates with ninety-nine of them occupied, unless there were some good reason for it. Dignity, on the other hand, urged that it was beneath me to show the least interest in anything except myself. As a rule I obey the voice of Dignity, but on this occasion Curiosity prevailed, and I stepped up to the nearest gate.

On the gate a man of middle age was seated, of striking appearance. He wore a pointed beard, and he was unusually handsome. His figure was athletic and graceful. It is always difficult to remember what any one wears, but he left in my mind a general impression of expensive fur, diamond sleeve-links, and great glossiness of boot. Raising my hat I apologised for troubling him, and asked if he could give me any information. He looked up, and threw away the cigar which he was smoking. In a languid voice he answered: 'We are stock characters—out of books, you know—and we're turned out to grass for the present, and that's why we sit on gates. Fatiguing weather, is it not?' He paused to light another cigar. 'Take my own case, for instance.'

'Thank you,' I said, 'I don't smoke.'

He took no notice of my remark, and I see now that I must have misunderstood him. 'I am a hero,' he continued, 'the ideal man as imagined by the idealess woman. I have been wonderfully popular in my time. At present I sit here and practise the leading traits in my character—my consumption of cigars, for instance.' He flung away the one he was smoking and carefully selected another. He sniffed at it gently, smiled, and dropped it into the ditch.

'I recognise you, sir,' I said. 'In most of the ladies' novels I think it is stated that you were educated at Cambridge or Oxford?'

'Good old Cambridge College!' he interpolated.

'Some of the books have given details,' I went on.

'Oh, details!' he interrupted, 'I should think they did. I rowed in the May sixes shortly after I'd taken my Fellowship at King's. The fellows there eat ham-pie and drink seltzer-and-hock. Such times! Learned men they are too, but cynical—very cynical. I remember when the old Regius Professor was coach-

ing me for my Smalls, in which I took a Special, sir, without work, he turned to me and said, with a bitter laugh: "My motto's *Pro ego*, sir, *Pro ego*—pass the audit." Splendid man he was, but always drunk! The enthusiasm he could awake in the young was wonderful. When he was raised to a Bishopric they accompanied him to the station, shouting after his cab in the words of the ten thousand under Insanias: "Thalassis! Thalassis! The See! the See!"

The excitement of recalling old times was too much for him, and he tumbled off his gate. He lay on his back, murmuring faintly, 'Egus, ege, egum, egi, ego, ego.' I have no conception what he meant, and after picking him up and putting him on his perch again, I ventured to ask for a free translation.

Before replying, he lighted and immediately threw away another cigar. 'Ah!' he said pityingly, 'you never had a classical education, you never were at Eton School. But you asked me, I believe, for a short sketch of my subsequent career. In after-life I frequently enter the army. She had refused me, you know, and my heart was broken. I did not know then, as I know now, that her only motive was that it would have cut the book short in the second volume if she had accepted me. They found my horse next morning in the stable, covered with foam from head to foot.'

'Poor old stable!' I sighed sympathetically.

'All night long,' he continued, 'I had been riding in the old desperate, dare-devil way—— Can you go on?'

'I can,' I replied. 'The noble animal seemed to have caught the reckless, untamed spirit of its rider. Over the black moorland and through the flooded river you sped together in that fearful ride. With the first glimmerings of dawn your resolution was taken, for your life was valueless.'

'Thank you,' he said, 'you've left out a page or two, but it will do. I entered the army in order to die on the battlefield. She naturally became a sister of mercy, and found me delirious in the hospital. She nursed me night and day, moved softly about, pressed cooling drinks to my burning forehead—and all that kind of thing, you know. The doctor generally remarks that it is the nurse, and not the doctor, that is to be complimented on my recovery.'

'It is too true,' I answered; 'but you are not always in the army.'

'Oh no; but, wherever I am, I have much the same peculiarities. Wealth is one of them; hence an almost painful profusion of cigars. My strong emotions are another. I frequently push away my plate untasted, owing to strong emotions; my emotions are nothing if they're not strong. Just see me smother an oath in my beard.'

'Don't trouble,' I said, 'if it hurts at all.'

'Well, I have a small beard, and I take a large size in oaths; but I do want you to understand that my emotions are strong, and take a great deal of repression. At such times I generally crush my heel into something, or gnaw my teeth or moustache, or curse a menial. You see that heel. It's been ground into the maple-wood flooring, into the rich tiger-skin on the carpet, into the wet sand of the seashore, into the fragrant violets, into almost everything into which a heel can be ground.'

'And yet,' I suggested, 'you have your moments of repose.'

'True,' he replied, 'but you see nothing of my heel then. I am not a Panpharmakon.' This was another touch of the classics which was lost upon me. 'On those occasions my accessories are more important even than myself; faultless evening-dress, silken cushions, perfumed lamps, for instance. I merely sit there lazily peeling a peach—peaches are an expensive fruit, aren't they?—or curling a loose leaf round my Manilla cheroot. A tame Circassian brings me a cup of Mocha coffee delicately flavoured with kirschwasser. There's an oriental tinge about it.'

'And now,' I asked, 'can you tell me why all you people are sitting on gates?'

Flinging a handful of gold into my face, to show his profusion, he replied:

'Because those who use us have no style; so we're compelled to sit on gates.'

'But,' I urged, 'the critics are always sitting on the style of those authors.'

'Indeed,' he retorted contemptuously; 'then how do you account for the critic on the hearth? But I will bandy no more words with you. Go and see my brother Jack on the next gate. He isn't rich, but he's burly, and athletic, and English. In some respects he's like me, and he's always in love.'

I turned away without any intention of visiting Jack. I felt certain that Jack would probably request me to have a few words with some intimate friend of his on the gate next to him, and

that I should be finally compelled to interview the whole of those ninety-nine individuals who were pining for someone to bore. I might possibly have a little conversation with some of them, but certainly not with all; and I was determined not to include Jack in my selection. However, as I passed his gate, he called to me:

'Stop a moment, sir. I am still as big, simple, light-hearted, frank, buoyant, and boyish as ever. You really ought to know me.'

'I know you only too well,' I replied brutally, 'and you don't interest me.'

'What!' he cried, 'not interested in poor Jack, no one's enemy but his own, with an arm as white as a duchess's and corded like a blacksmith's! You must be joking. Why, sir, I was playing football for England *v.* Wales the other day—a hot afternoon in June it was. I was half-forward, and we were being beaten, when I looked up and saw that the dear girl was watching us. It seemed to put new strength into me. I set my teeth hard, and with a cry of "Julia!" plunged into the scrimmage, secured the ball, and bore it off in triumph to our own goal. I shall never forget it.'

'Tell me honestly,' I said, 'are you often as far gone as this?'

'I am sorry to say,' he answered, 'that the public seem to have lost their taste for me in quite so strong a form. But I still exist. I still preach the great gospel of manliness.'

'What is that?' I asked.

'Be strong. Knock your neighbour down, and love him as yourself.'

I noticed with considerable satisfaction that the apostle of manliness was secured to his gate by a short iron chain, so I took this opportunity of expressing my opinion of him. 'I regret,' I said, 'that I must repeat my assertion that I am not interested in you. You have been done well, but of late years you have been overdone. I do not think much of your gospel, because I do not believe that the highest form of manhood is the affectionate bargee. I have also noticed some defects in your character. Your great point is your pluckiness: and yet you are not plucky. As you always knock your man down, it stands to reason that you never attack anyone who is superior to yourself. You are constantly standing up for the right, but your method is so abominably dull and monotonous that you make the wrong seem preferable. When you were treated idiotically, I was amused at you; when you fell into better hands, I liked you; at the present moment

I am exceedingly weary of you, sorry to have met you, and trust I shall never see you again. Good morning.'

His only answer as I moved away was a long low whistle. This is the way in which he habitually expresses surprise.

I had been so disappointed with the two characters I had already seen that I thought I would interview one or two of the opposite sex and then go home. But I had not passed many gates before the occupant of one of them called out to me, a little snappishly :

'Why don't you laugh?'

I turned round and saw before me a man of middle age with sandy hair and a pale green face. He was dressed as a City clerk, but without a hat, and he was smoking a new clay pipe.

'Why don't you laugh?' he repeated.

'Why should I?' I asked.

'Why should you? Well, sir, I'm the leading character of English comic verse, and I've just sat down on a new silk hat. I don't know what else you want. You must have heard it go pop, but there's no pleasing some people. Perhaps you didn't know my name was Jinkins. As a general rule, I've only just got to mention that, and then the smile begins to slowly spread itself. It's a curious fact how truly humorous all names are which end in *-kins*. There's nothing particular about the name Tom, but Tompkins is really funny. Jinkins is still funnier. Look here, you're not laughing.'

I felt too depressed to be rude to the man. Even as he spoke the sun, which had been shining brightly, went in, and the wind changed to due east. The air seemed to be heavily charged with flat soda-water and the back numbers of a dead comic paper. When I told this dream to Timson he flatly denied that such an atmosphere was possible, even in dreams. But I experienced it, and I suppose I ought to know.

'I am very sorry,' I said, 'but I do not fancy that I shall ever smile again.'

'But you haven't heard all,' he replied, with a kind of desperation. 'There's this pipe. Now I'm not used to smoking, so I shall be sick. Sometimes I travel on a steamer, and that makes me sick. It doesn't seem to matter much as long as I *am* sick. That's what England really wants. It's popular with all classes, but you're too dense to see it. Sometimes I go home drunk late at night, or I drop the baby, or I'm thrown off a horse, or I have a painful impediment in my speech. Curates recite me at penny-

readings, because there's no vulgarity about me. And, as I said before, my name's Jinkins.'

This finished me. I felt at once that I could interview no more characters, and that my best course was to go home at once, and go to bed, and stop there. I felt prostrated by humiliation and agonising dulness. But it was not to be.

'You don't look very cheerful,' the brute remarked, 'and yet I'm sure I've done my best. But do go round to the other side of the field. You'll find my wife there. I'm compelled by the tradition of men to speak of her as the "missus." What a fine old girl she is! She will probably commence conversation by saying, "Drat the man!" or "Like his imperence!" But both are funny. It's a light and tasty style that I should think would just suit a man like you. Do promise me to go and see her. She's certain to cheer you up.'

'I positively refuse to see your wife. I am going home.'

But even as I spoke the field began to turn gently round, while the lane in which I stood remained perfectly still. I think I ought to say that, when I recounted this part of my story to Timson, he positively refused to credit it. He pointed out that a square field revolving on its own centre would come right across the lane which bordered one side of it, and that anyone in that lane would be swept into space. I am quite unable to answer him. I have no doubt that, if I could have managed my dream a little more mathematically, I should have been swept into space. I could only point out to Timson once more that I had not had his experience in dreaming, and that he must not look for too much from a beginner. At the conclusion of my dream I did obey a known mathematical law, which certainly seems as if I had improved with practice. Besides, let us suppose that the field revolved not on its own centre, but on some centre that it had borrowed for the occasion—where are Timson's arguments then?

The fact remains that, although the field most certainly turned round, it did not interfere with me in the least. One by one familiar characters on their respective gates passed slowly before my eyes. There was the impossible rustic, scratching his head, and talking that mixture of Devonshire, Cumberland, and the imagination which is the recognised village dialect. Then came the negro servant. He hailed me as 'Buckra massa.' I don't know what it means, but I suppose it's all right. He disapproved of the motion of the field. 'Me plenty fear. Me no like dis

sarecular rotability, sare.' I had not time to inquire whether his name was Pompey or Cæsar. The negro servants of fiction generally are either one or the other, and I have known one bad case where the poor man was both. He was followed by the usual family lawyer, who was wrinkling his brow, rubbing his white hands, and giving his dry and deprecatory coughs alternately. I have tried the deprecatory cough myself, but with no success to speak of. Then the field began to move faster. The characters on their respective gates simply flew past. The traditional sailor only just had time to expectorate and offer a short prayer for the destruction of his vision before he vanished from my eyes; and out of the whirling chaos came a flash of bright green bonnet-strings and a shrill cry of 'Where's that blessed child?' I knew it was Mrs. Jinkins. She had passed in the very act of being amusing but not vulgar. The worst, at any rate, was over. A second afterwards the field stopped short.

A very pretty girl, with soft dark hair and a graceful figure, was sitting on the gate immediately before me, with a book in her hands. I knew her at once. I knew that her ear resembled a delicate pink sea-shell. I knew that her eyelashes must inevitably be long. She was the charming, innocent type. The hero finds her thus in her guileless village simplicity, reading some harmless story, in her inexpensive white dress with the knot of common or garden geranium at the neck. He startles her as he passes, and she drops her book, and he picks it up. It is thus that the intimacy begins. She is the daughter of the poor vicar, and he is the scion of a noble house. He has come to the village for the sake of rest, or fishing, or sketching. Whichever it is, he does it rather better than anyone else. It is a way these heroes have. The poor, old, grey-headed vicar goes pottering about his garden, and never sees that a train for a three-volume novel is being laid under his very nose. He is devoted, of course, to his only daughter, and his blindness proceeds partly from the childlike simplicity which is natural to these sylvan haunts, but also because he must be aware by this time that the story could not possibly get on without it. So the hero makes love to her, because he is not in the least in love with her; and she does not make love to him, because she is very much in love with him. In this sinful world the heroes get most of the under-cut. As a rule he kisses her on the eyes and mouth alone; but the nose and back-hair are the only parts of a girl's head which the hero never

kisses. He leaves the village and marries someone else. Then comes the breakfast-table scene, which we all know and hate so well. She takes up the newspaper with a merry laugh, and suddenly sees the advertisement of the hero's marriage. She turns deadly pale, grasps the table to save herself from falling, and, murmuring that the heat is too much for her and that she will be better presently, staggers from the room. The complacency and blandness with which this excuse is always received is simply maddening. 'Poor child!' the vicar murmurs pensively, as he sips his last cup of tea, and then goes out to play the fool among the azaleas without giving the matter another thought.

If the book is to be sad, she pines and dies; if it is to be cheerful, the curate, who has all the time adored her in secret, now comes to the fore, kisses over the same old ground, and finally marries her.

As I looked at her, I felt sorry for her. I determined to give her a little variety in her monotonous existence. So I stepped softly up to her, took her by the hair, and kissed the tip of her nose. There was a whirl and a click as of machinery set in motion. Then she gave a little frightened cry and fluttered like a bird. I might have known it—a kiss is as certain to produce this effect on the innocent and automatic doll of fiction as the placing of a penny in the slot is to procure fusees when you want wax vestas.

There were several other ladies on adjacent gates, but I am naturally rather shy, and I did not have much conversation with them. One was in a riding-habit. She glanced at me with evident disapprobation from head to foot, and told me that a certain kind of stretcher prevented the male garment from becoming baggy at the fetlocks. I had read 'The Stench of the Stables' and one or two other sporting novels, so I knew that her conversation would not be intelligible, and I did not stop to hear any more of it. Next to her was the small plain governess who confides to her diary how surprised she is that all the male characters fall in love with her. It is a pleasing trait in the virginal character.

'I've just made an entry,' she said.

'I don't want to contradict you,' I replied, 'but I fail to understand how you can make the entry when you're sitting on the gate.'

She corrected my mistake. 'I referred to my diary, and not to the field,' she answered. 'I will read it to you.'

I expostulated, but her only reply was to read as follows from a little volume bound in morocco :

'Another hot morning in the schoolroom. Editha was very unruly again, and did not know her geography. I hope I was not unkind to her, but I was very firm. I told her that she must learn it again, and that I would finish correcting her theme in the meantime. While I was engaged thus, Mr. Charles sauntered into the schoolroom. I tried to speak quite sharply to him, and to tell him that it was not the place for him, but I am afraid that my poor little voice quavered. He only laughed at me, and began putting flies in the inkpot. Then he came round behind me and let my hair down. "What a little beauty it is!" he said banteringly. I told him that if he did not go away I would tell Mrs. Beecham. So he retired, walking out of the room on his hands. How strong and manly he is! Can he possibly see any beauty in my poor insignificant face? If only my dear aunt Maria were here to advise me!'

I thanked her, and passed on until I came to the gate which was next the principal entrance. A curate sat upon it. Occasionally he pressed his forehead with one hand in a weary way. There were dark lines under his eyes, and he gazed at me as if I hurt him badly.

'You were wondering who I am,' he said, and it was hardly worth while to contradict him. 'I am the uncommon curate.'

'Then,' I said, 'you had better get off that gate. This field is reserved for commonplace characters only.'

'Ah!' he moaned, in a voice so tired that it almost seemed to ache, 'you don't understand. The uncommon curate has now grown more common than the other sort. You expect a curate to be a good man and a Christian. The most commonplace way of avoiding the commonplace is to make him either a murderer or an agnostic. It is far from difficult; a mere child can apply it. For myself, I am perfectly conscientious and unusually intelligent. That is why I took orders without examining the faith that I professed to embrace. I'm not a Christian now, and my wife won't be an agnostic. She is pious, but dull—mostly cold mutton and hymns. So I've gone and made a nice little religion all to myself. Sermons! I should think so—regular stingers! Ah me!' He gave a sigh that shook the gate till it rattled.

I did not see any way to console the poor man. I thought of pointing out that those who read about him suffered even more than himself, but I was by no means sure how he would take it, so I changed the subject. 'I see that the gate next to you—the principal entrance—is vacant. Are you expecting anyone?'

To my surprise he brightened up at once. 'Yes,' he said, 'we've been waiting for you. The man who tries to get a cheap reputation for wit by sneering at things not worth the sneer is the most commonplace character of all. Pray be seated.'

I obeyed, because I could not help it, and the field at once began to rotate. Faster and faster it whirled round. I clung to my gate, but known mathematical laws were too much for me. I was flung into space, went into three volumes, and was much appreciated by the public. The surprise awoke me.

WEEDS.

WHEN I say weeds, I do *not* mean cigars. The fragrant weed, as cheap essayists of the Dick Swiveller school love to call it, is not a weed at all, but on the contrary an expensive and legitimate product of commerce and agriculture. So far from growing wild anywhere in the world in that kind of profusion which weediness implies, tobacco is indeed a dainty plant that requires careful drainage, excellent shelter, and such an amount of rich manure as seldom or never occurs on any field casually in a state of nature. In fact, the Virginian nicotiana is well known to be a most exhausting crop, rapidly using up the potash and lime of the soil in which it roots, and grown to the greatest perfection as a garden plant in virgin land only. Hence it has nothing at all to do with the present philosophical discussion, any more than widows' weeds or the gay weeds of poetry: the sole weed I contemplate for the moment being the common weedy weed of the average cornfield or of the domestic flower-garden.

But what exactly constitutes any plant a genuine weed it would be hard to say: only as dirt is matter in the wrong place, so, I take it, a weed is simply a herb or flower which grows where the agriculturist or the gardener doesn't want it. A curious instance of the relativity of weediness (as John Stuart Mill would have put it) will point this moral to greater advantage. There is a well-known blue garden-flower which rejoices in the tasteful scientific name of *ageratum*, and which adorns the old-fashioned 'mixed border' in the grounds of many an innocent suburban villa. Now, the wife of a former Governor of Ceylon, says veracious legend, anxious to transport loved memories of other days to her new home, brought over a plant of this familiar hardy annual from Clapham or Lee to her garden at Colombo. The climate of the Indies suited the new-comer down to the ground, and it began to spread over the adjacent plots with marvellous rapidity. Furthermore, it has winged seeds, which the balmy breezes that (according to the poet) 'blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle' immediately wafted to every part of that fertile region. The consequence is that nowadays the people, as in Lord Tennyson's apologue, 'call it but a weed,' and with good reason: for it has

been calculated that it costs the unlucky planters over 250,000*l.* yearly to keep down that blue ageratum in their coffee plantations.

The great moral lesson of this interesting little tale is not far to seek. A herb or shrub is a 'garden plant' as long as it grows only where you want it to grow: the moment it begins to spread beyond control and flourish exceedingly of its own accord, it is considered as a weed, and receives no quarter from the hard heart and harder hands of the irate agriculturist. Clover is a 'crop,' where it is deliberately sown: but when it comes up lawlessly of its own mere motion in a flower-bed on the lawn, it is treated at once to Jedburgh justice—decapitated and mutilated at sight, without form of trial.

Hence it also results that a weed, wherever it shows its weedy nature, belongs to what Darwin used to call 'a dominant species,' that is to say, one that then and there can take care of itself, and live down or kill out all feebler competitors. It is this vivacious peculiarity that constitutes the original sin of all weeds: they are plants that you don't want to grow, but that nevertheless possess qualities and attributes which enable them to oust and overshadow those that you do. Most of the flowers or fruits man selfishly tills for his own base purposes, to smell at or to eat, are more or less exotics in most countries where he tills them. Left to themselves, they would soon be overrun by the hardier natives, the strong and vigorous plants that exactly suit the soil and climate. Therefore cultivation—tell it not to the Cobden Club—consists essentially in the suppression of weeds, or in other words the restriction of free and natural competition. It is protection run rampant. We clear a given space, with plough, spade, hoe, or cutlass, from its native vegetation; we plant the seeds of species that do not normally grow there; and then, as far as possible, we keep down the intrusive aborigines that seek always to return, by continuous toil of hand or instrument. And this is really and truly almost all that anybody means by cultivation.

Man, however, is not the only animal who has discovered this eminently practical division of the vegetable world into weeds on the one hand and garden plants on the other. Our ingenious little six-legged precursors, the ants, have anticipated us in this as in so many other useful discoveries and inventions. They were the first gardeners. I need hardly add that it is an American ant that carries the art of horticulture to the highest perfection: only

a Yankee insect would be so advanced, and only Yankee naturalists would be sharp enough to discover its method. This particular little beast who grows grain resides in Texas; and each nest owns a small claim in the vicinity of its mound, on which it cultivates a kind of grass, commonly known as ant-rice. The claim is circular, about ten or twelve feet in diameter: and the ants allow no plant but the ant-rice to encroach upon the cleared space anywhere. The produce of the crop they carefully harvest, though authorities are still disagreed upon the final question whether they plant the grain, or merely allow it to sow its own seed itself on the protected area. One thing, however, is certain—that no other plant is permitted to sprout on the tabooed patch: the ants wage war on weeds far more vigorously and effectually than our own agriculturists. Even in our less go-ahead eastern continent, Sir John Lubbock has noticed in Algeria (and the present humble observer has verified the fact) that ants allow only certain species of plants, useful to themselves, to grow in the immediate neighbourhood of their nests.

But the very fact that we have to root out weeds proves that the weeds, if left to themselves, would live down the plants we prefer to cultivate. Everybody knows that if a garden is allowed to 'run wild,' as we oddly phrase it, coarse herbs of various kinds—nettles, groundsels, and ragworts—will soon crush out the dahlias, geraniums, and irises with which we formerly stocked it. On the other hand, everybody also knows that very few garden plants, even the hardiest, ever venture to look over the garden wall, ever sow themselves outside and naturalise themselves even in favourable situations. Of course there are exceptions, like the *ageratum* in Ceylon, or the ivy-leaved toad-flax in England: and to these, the parents of the future cosmopolitan weeds, I shall hereafter address myself. For the present, it is sufficient to notice that a weed is a plant capable of living down most other species, and of taking care of itself in free open situations.

I say of set purpose 'in free open situations,' for nobody regards any forest tree or woodland herb as a weed: because such plants don't come into competition with our crops or flowers. To be sure, some of these forestine types are quite as obtrusively pushing, in their own way, and therefore quite as truly weedy at heart, as charlock or couchgrass, those dreaded enemies of the agricultural interest. For example, the beech is a most aggressive and barefaced monopolist—a sort of arboreal Vanderbilt or

Jay Gould—and under the dense shade of its closely-leaved and spreading branches, no forest tree, except its own hardy seedlings, stands the faintest chance in the struggle for existence. Even the most unobservant townsman must have noticed (like Tityrus) that the ground is always bare or at best just lightly moss-clad *patulæ sub tegmine fagi*. It is known, indeed, that in Denmark the beech, with its thick shade of close-set foliage, is driving out the lighter and more sparsely-leaved birch in the forests where the two once grew like friends together. At touch of the stronger tree, the slender silvery birch loses its lower branches, and devotes all its strength at first to its topmost boughs, which fade one after another till it succumbs at last of old age or inanition. So, in a minor degree, among the lower woodland flora of America, the beautiful May-apple, a most poetic plant (which in its compounded form supplies the returned Anglo-Indian with that excellent substitute for his lost liver, podophyllin pills), has large round leaves, eight or ten inches across, and expanded by ribs from a stalk in the centre exactly after the fashion of a Japanese parasol, on purpose to prevent rival plants that sprout beneath from obtaining their fair share of air and sunshine.

None of these greedy woodland kinds, however, are weeds for us, because they don't interfere with our own peculiar cultivated plants. Man tills only the open plain; and therefore it is only the wild herbs which naturally grow in the full eye of day that can compete at an advantage with his corn, his turnips, his beet-root, or his sugar-cane. Hence arises a curious and very interesting fact, that the greater part of the common weeds of western Europe and America are neither west European nor American at all, but Asiatic or at least Mediterranean in type or origin. Our best-known English wayside herbs are for the most part aliens, and they have come here in the wake of intrusive cultivation.

The reason is obvious. Western Europe and eastern America, in their native condition, were forest-clad regions. When civilised man came with his axe and plough, he cleared and tilled them. Now, the wild flowers and plants that grow beneath the shades of the forest primæval won't bear the open heat of the noonday sun. The consequence is that, whenever the forest primæval is cleared, a new vegetation usurps the soil, a vegetation which necessarily comes from elsewhere. In America, where the substitution is a thing of such very late date, we can trace the limits of the two

floras, native and intrusive, with perfect ease and certainty. Strange as it sounds to say so, European weeds of cultivation have taken possession of all eastern America to the exclusion of the true native woodland flora almost as fully as the European white man with his horses and cows has taken possession of the soil to the exclusion of the noble Red Indian and his correlative buffalo. The common plants that one sees about New York, Philadelphia, and Boston are just the familiar dandelions, and thistles, and ox-eye daisies of our own beloved fatherland. In open defiance of the Monroe doctrine, the British weed lords it over the fields of the great republic: the native American plant, like the native American man, has slunk back into the remote and modest shades of far western woodlands. Nay, the native American man himself had noted this coincidence in his Mayne Reidish way before he left Massachusetts for parts unknown: for he called our ugly little English plantain or ribgrass 'the White Man's Foot,' and declared that wherever the intrusive pale-face planted his sole, there this European weed sprang up spontaneous, and ousted the old vegetation of the primæval forest. A pretty legend, but, Asa Gray tells us, botanically indefensible.

What is happening to-day under our own eyes (or the eyes of our colonial correspondents) in Australia and New Zealand helps us still further to understand the nature of this strange deluge of ugly and uncouth plants—a deluge which is destined, I believe, to swamp, in time, all the cultivable lowlands of the entire world, and to cover the face of accessible nature before many centuries with a single dead-level of cosmopolitan weediness. When the great southern continent and the great southern island were first discovered, they possessed the most absurdly belated fauna and flora existing anywhere in the whole world. They were hopelessly out of date; a couple of million years or so at least behind the fashion in the rest of the globe. Their plants and animals were of a kind that had 'gone out' in Europe about the time when the chalk was accumulating on an inland sea across the face of the South Downs, and the central plain of France and Belgium. It naturally resulted that these antiquated creatures, developed to suit the conditions of the cretaceous world, could no more hold their own against the improved species imported from nineteenth century Europe than the Australian black fellow could hold his own against the noble possessor of the Remington rifle. European animals and European plants overran this new province with

astonishing rapidity. The English rat beat the Maori rat out of the field as soon as he looked at him. The rabbit usurped the broad Australian plains, so that baffled legislators now seek in vain some cheap and effectual means of slaying him wholesale. The horse has become a very weed among animals in Victoria, and the squatters shoot him off in organised battues, merely to check his lawless depredations upon their unfenced sheep-walks.

It is the same with the plants, only, if possible, a little more so. Our petty English knotgrass, which at home is but an insignificant roadside trailer, thrives in the unencumbered soil of New Zealand so hugely that single weeds sometimes cover a space five feet in diameter, and send their roots four feet deep into the rich ground. Our vulgar little sow-thistle, a yellow composite plant with winged seeds like dandelion-down, admirably adapted for dispersal by the wind, covers all the country up to a height of 6,000 feet upon the mountain sides. The watercress of our breakfast tables, in Europe a mere casual brookside plant, chokes the New Zealand rivers with stems twelve feet long, and costs the colonists of Christchurch alone 300*l.* a year in dredging their Avon free from it. Even so small and low-growing a plant as our white clover (which, being excellent fodder, doesn't technically rank as a weed) has completely strangled its immense antagonist, the New Zealand flax, a huge iris-like aloe, with leaves as tall as a British Grenadier, and fibres powerful enough to make cords and ropes fit to hang a sheep-stealer. For weeds are genuine Jack-the-Giant-killers in their own way; a very small plant can often live down a very big one, by mere persistent usurpation of leaf-space and root-medium.

Sometimes the origin of these obtrusive settlers in new countries is ridiculously casual. For example, a dirty little English weed of the weediest sort thrives and flourishes abundantly on a remote, uninhabited island of the Antarctic seas. How did it get there? Well, the first observers who found it on the island noticed that it grew in the greatest quantities near a certain spot, which turned out on examination to be the forgotten grave of an English sailor. Here was the solution of that curious mystery in geographical distribution. The grave had of course been dug with a civilised spade; and that spade had presumably been brought from England. Clinging to its surface at the time it was used were no doubt some little unnoticed clots of British clay, embedded in whose midst was a single seed, that rubbed itself off,

it would seem, against the newly-dug earth. The embryo germinated, and grew to be a plant; and in a very few years, in that unoccupied soil, the whole island was covered with its numerous descendants. Finding a fair field and no favour, which is the very essence of natural selection, it had been fruitful, and multiplied, and replenished the earth to some purpose, as all weeds will do when no human hand interferes to prevent them.

The greater part of our existing weeds, as I already remarked, come to us, like all the rest of our civilisation, good, bad, or indifferent, from the remote east. In many cases their country of origin is not even now fully known; they are probably as antique as cultivation itself, contemporaries of the bronze-age or stone-age pioneers, and have spread westward with corn and barley till they have now fairly made the tour of the world, and like all other globe-trotters might consider themselves entitled at last to write a book about their travels. Our little shepherd's-purse is a good typical example of these cosmopolitan voyagers; there is hardly a quarter of the world where it does not now grow in great profusion; yet it is nowhere found far from human habitations; it loves the roadside, the garden, the fallow, the bare patch in towns where the tall board of the eligible building site 'lifts its head and lies' with more brazen impudence than even the London Monument. Even to-day, nobody knows where this ubiquitous foundling, this gipsy among plants, really comes from. It is a native of nowhere. All that the most authoritative of our botanists can find to tell us about it is that it may be 'probably of European or West Asiatic origin, but now one of the commonest weeds in cultivated and waste places, nearly all over the globe without the tropics.' Like the rat and the cockroach, it follows civilisation in every ship; it spreads its seeds with every sack of corn; and it accompanies the emigrant, in the very dirt on his boots, to every corner of the colonisable earth.

It doesn't necessarily follow, however, that all weeds are ugly or inconspicuous. Some familiar pests, which seem to have been specially developed to suit the exigencies of cornfield cultivation, are both noticeable and handsome. Our scarlet corn-poppies, our blue corn-cockles, our purple corn-campion, are instances in point; so is the still more brilliant southern cornflag or wild gladiolus that stars, with its tall spikes of crimson blossom, the waving expanse of French and Italian wheat-fields. I think the reason here is that corn is wind-fertilised, so the plants that grow among

its tall stems, in order to attract the fertilising insects sufficiently, have themselves to be tall and very attractive. In other respects, however, it is curious to notice how closely these beautiful weeds have accommodated their habits to the peculiar circumstances of cornfield tillage. The soil is ploughed over once a year; so they are all annuals; roots or bulbs would be crushed or destroyed in the ploughing; they flower with the corn, ripen with the corn, are reaped and thrashed with the corn, and get their seeds sown by the farmer with his seed-corn in spite of his own efforts. One of the most deadly and destructive among them, indeed, the parasitical cow-wheat, which fastens its murderous sucker-like roots to the rootlets of the corn, and saps the life-blood of the standing crop, has gone so far as to produce seeds that exactly imitate a grain of wheat, and can only accurately be distinguished from the honest grains among which they lurk by a close and discriminative botanical scrutiny. This is one of the best instances known of true mimicry in the vegetable world, and it is as successful in the greater part of Europe as such wicked schemes always manage to be.

Still, as a rule, weeds undoubtedly *are* weedy-looking; they are the degraded types that can drag out a miserable existence somehow in open sunlit spots, with short allowance of either soil or water. Most of them have fly-away feathery seeds, like thistles, dandelion, groundsel, and coltsfoot: all of them have advanced means of dispersion of one sort or another, which ensure their going everywhere that wind or water, beast or bird, or human hands can possibly carry them. Some, like burrs and tickseed, stick into the woolly fleeces of sheep or goats, and get rubbed off in time against trees or hedgerows: others, like the most dangerous Australian pest, are eaten by parrots, who distribute the undigested seeds broadcast. A great many have stings, like the nettle, or are prickly, like thistles, or at least are rough and unpleasantly hairy, like comfrey, hemp-nettle, borage, and bugloss. The weediest families are almost all disagreeably hirsute, with a tendency to run off into spines and thorns or other aggressive weapons on the slightest provocation. Their flowers are usually poor and inconspicuous, because weedy spots are not the favourite feeding grounds of bees and butterflies, to whose æsthetic intervention we owe the greater number of our most beautiful blossoms: indeed, a vast majority of weeds show an inclination to go back to the low habit of self-fertilisation (long cast aside by the higher plants), which always involves the production of very grubby and

wretched little flowers. As a whole, in short, the weedy spirit in plants resembles the slummy or urban spirit in humanity; the same causes that produce the one produce the other, and the results in either case tend to assimilate in a striking manner.

Till very recently, the cosmopolitan weed was for the most part one of Mediterranean or West Asiatic origin. It could at least claim to be a foster-brother and contemporary of nascent civilisation, a countryman of the Pharaohs, the Sennacheribs, or the Achæmenids. Of late years, however, new weeds from parts unknown, without pedigree or historical claims, are beginning to push their way to the front, and to oust these comparatively noble descendants of Egyptian and Mesopotamian ancestors. The Great West is turning the tables upon us at last, and sending us a fresh crop of prairie weeds of its own devising, as it now threatens us also with the caucus, the convention, and the Colorado beetle. A return-wave of emigration from west to east is actually in progress; and in weeds, this return-wave promises in the end to assume something like gigantic proportions. Many years ago, the great Boston botanist, Asa Gray, prophesied its advent, and his prophecy has ever since gone on fulfilling itself at the usual rapid rate of all American phenomena, social or natural.

It is easy enough to see why the western weeds should have the best of it in the end, under a *régime* of universal civilisation. Eastern America, this side the Alleghanies, was a forest-clad region till a couple of centuries since; and when its forests were cleared, French and English vegetation supplanted the native woodland flora. But the Mississippi Valley had been from the very beginning a vast basin of treeless prairie-land; and on these sun-smitten prairies, innumerable stout plants of the true weedy sort had such elbow-room to grow and compete with one another as nowhere else in the whole world, save perhaps on the similar South American pampas. Here, then, the struggle for existence among field-weeds would be widest and fiercest; here the most perfect adaptations of plant life to meadow or pasture conditions would be sure to evolve themselves; here the weed would naturally reach the very highest pitch of preternatural and constitutional weediness. As long, however, as the forest intervened between the open prairies and the eastern farms, these rude western weeds had no chance of spreading into the sunny crofts and gardens of the neat New England farmer. But when once the flowing tide of civilisation reached the prairie district, a change came o'er the spirit of the cone-flower's or the tick-seed's dream.

By the cutting down of the intermediate forest belt, man had turned these adventurous plants into vegetable Alexanders, who found new worlds, hitherto unsuspected, before them to conquer. They were equal to the occasion. The prairie vegetation set out on its travels eastward, to reach, and soon I believe to cross in its thousands the barrier of the Atlantic.

The railways helped the prairie migrants greatly on their eastward march; indeed, what is the good of railways if it isn't to facilitate communications between place and place? And the run of the railways exactly suited the weeds, for almost all the great trunk lines of America lie due east and west, so as to bring the corn and pork of the Mississippi Valley to the great shipping ports of the Atlantic seaboard. But they brought the pests of agriculture just as well. The waste spaces along their sides form everywhere beautiful nurseries for weeds to multiply in; and the prevailing north-west winds, which in America blow on an average three days out of four the year round, carried their winged seeds bravely onward towards the unconscious farms of Pennsylvania and Connecticut. Another way, however, in which the prairie plagues spread even more insidiously was by the eastern farmer using western seed, in the innocence of his heart, to sow his fields with, and thus introducing the foe in full force with his own hands into his doomed domain. One of the worst pests of Wisconsin and Minnesota has thus been naturalised in Canada through the use of Western clover-seed. Some twenty years ago, prairie weeds were unknown everywhere along the Atlantic seaboard; now, they dispute possession with the European buttercups, dandelions, or goose-foots, and will soon, in virtue of their sturdier and stringier prairie constitution, habituated to long drought or broiling sunshine, live down those damp-loving and dainty cis-Atlantic weeds.

In time, too, they must reach Europe; and here they will in many cases almost entirely swamp our native vegetation. In fact I think there can be little doubt that, with the increase of intercourse all over the world, a few hardy cosmopolitan weeds must tend in the long run to divide the empire of life, and map out the cultivable plains of the globe between them. Symptoms of this tendency have long been noted, and are growing clearer and clearer every day before our eyes. Weeds are keeping well abreast of the march of intellect, and are marching, too, wherever (like the missionaries) they find a door opened in front of them. In fact, they stand in the very van of progress, and sometimes spread even into uncivilised tracts as fast as the salvationist, the slave-

trader, and the dealer in rum, rifles, and patent medicines generally.

Now, every country, however uncivilised, has a few true weeds of its own—local plants which manage to live on among the cleared spaces by the native huts, or in the patches of yam, Indian corn, and plantain. The best of these weeds—that is to say, the weediest—may be able to compete in the struggle for life even with the well-developed and fully-equipped plagues of more cultivated countries. Thus, even before the opening out of the prairie region, a few American plants of the baser sort had already established themselves by hook or by crook in Europe, and especially in the dry and congenial Mediterranean region. I don't count cases like that of the Canadian river-stopper, the plant that clogs with its long waving tresses all our canals and navigable streams, because there the advantage of Canada, with its endless network of sluggish waterways, is immediately obvious; a plant developed under such special conditions must almost certainly live down with ease and grace our poor little English crowfoots and brookweeds. But the Canadian fleabane, a scrubby, dusty, roadside annual, with endless little fluffy fruits as light as air, has, for more than a century, held its own in the greatest abundance as a highway vagabond in almost all temperate and hot climates; while the Virginian milkweed, also favoured by its cottony seeds, is now as common in many parts of the Old World as in the barren parts of its native continent. I don't doubt that in time these picked weeds of all the open lowland regions, but more especially those of the prairies, the pampas, the steppes, and the veldt, will overrun the greater part of the habitable globe. They are the fittest for their own particular purpose, and fitness is all that nature cares about. We shall thus lose a great deal in picturesque variety between country and country, because the main features of the vegetation will be everywhere the same, no matter where we go, as they already are in Europe and Eastern America. *Toujours perdrix* is bad enough, but *toujours lait d'âne*—always sow-thistle—is surely something too horrible to contemplate.

Nevertheless, the symptoms of this dead-level cosmopolitanisation of the world's flora abound to the discerning eye everywhere around us. At least three North American weeds have already made good their hold in England, and one of them, the latest comer, a harmless little *Claytonia* from the north-western States, is spreading visibly every year under my own eyes in my own part of Surrey. Thirty years ago Mr. Brewer, of Reigate, noted

with interest in his garden at that town the appearance of a small exotic *Veronica*; the 'interesting' little plant is now by far a commoner pest in all the fields of southern England than almost any one of our native knotweeds, thistles, or charlocks. The Peruvian *galinsoga* (I apologise for its not having yet acquired an English name; our farmers will find one for it before many years) has spread immensely in Italy and the Riviera, and now grows quite commonly wild on the roadsides about Kew, whence it will swoop in time with devouring effect upon the surrounding counties. Elsewhere in the world our European thistles have usurped whole thousands of square miles in the plains of La Plata, while in Australia the South African Capeweed, a most pugnacious composite, has rendered vast areas of sheep-walk unfit for grazing. These are but a few out of thousands of instances which might easily be given of the way in which the cosmopolitan weed is driving out the native vegetation all over the world, just as the brown rat of the Lower Volga has driven out the old black rat in every civilised land, and as the European house-fly and the Asiatic cockroach have driven out the less pestiferous flies, crickets, and midges of most other countries.

Finally, let us give the devil his due. These weeds do not necessarily in every case live down all kinds of cultivated plants; it is an open fight between them, in which victory inclines sometimes to one side and sometimes to the other. Thus sorrel and knotweed are terrible plagues in New Zealand, but they yield at last to judicious treatment if the ground is thoroughly sown with red clover. On the other hand, though white clover is strong enough to live down all the native New Zealand weeds, if our coarsest English hawkweed once gets into the soil, with its deep taproot and its many-winged seeds, the clover is nowhere in the hopeless struggle with that most masterful composite. Once more, Mr. Wallace tells us that the Capeweed, long considered 'unexterminable' in Australia, has succumbed, after many trials, to the dense herbage formed by cultivated lucerne and choice grasses. In this way man will have to fight and conquer the cosmopolitan weed all the world over when its time comes, and will succeed in the end. But his commercial and agricultural success will be but a small consolation after all to the lover of nature for that general vulgarisation and equalisation of the world's flora which universal culture and increased intercourse must almost of necessity bring in their train to every quarter of the habitable globe.

ON HAMPSTEAD HILL.

TERRIBLE city brooding at my feet !
 Yet is the warm air sweet
 Winnowed by wind and sun ; the great clouds sail
 Driven by the strenuous gale ;
 Drown'd in wide seas of light upsprings the lark ;
 Fire-tipped the velvet dark
 With pale green flames of yonder branching fir ;
 Dew-pearled the gossamer
 Where 'neath the gorse's sheltering shield of gold
 The fern's young fronds unfold ;
 Amber against the blue the aspen heaves
 Its myriad lives of leaves,
 And the ineffable beauty of the beech
 Is beyond human speech ;
 Far off the folded hills dream innocent
 In measureless content.
 Ah ! up these happy slopes by bounds and leaps
 A stealthy shadow creeps,
 Dimming the daisies' starshine, quenching all
 The radiant festival.
 A dolorous echo of the cruel streets
 The exultant springtide greets ;
 Voices of lamentation and of woe
 Across the finches go ;
 Upstreams a waiting horror, dusky, great,
 Vaguely articulate.
 All the hereditary hideous wrong
 The weak bear from the strong ;
 The dumb brute's patient anguish, and the wild
 Dread of the cowering child ;
 Lost souls that in their blindness grope for light
 Hurl'd back again to night,

ON HAMPSTEAD HILL.

Over whose bleeding hearts triumphal went
A world omnipotent ;
Faces the unholy greed of gain has trod
Out of all kin to God ;
Lives that were banned from bitter birth by fate
To a relentless hate,
Stricken unheeding in the cursing press
Of the grim battle's stress,
Trampled and trodden in the pitiless strife
Of the mad race for life—
Ah ! how can thrushes sing and green things be
Close to this upas tree !
Patience ! Stoop where the little grasses nod,
And gather from the sod
One shining blade, so slender, lucent, thin
That you can see within
The emerald life-blood coursing, this frail leaf
Gives the sick soul relief ;
Returning sanity of mind doth bring,—
The endlessness of spring !
When not a stone of that vast city's pride
Shall lie there side by side,
When temples, palaces, and senates fall,
Victor above them all
Potential mighty the small daisies stand
The true lords of the land.
Clear in a thousand centuries as this minute
Shall yearly trill the linnet ;
White-wingèd clouds their drifting purples cast
When all man made is past.
The empires have their day, and creeds shall fade.
Earth keeps her grassy blade !

THE COUNTY.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE REVELATION.

THE stable clock is striking three when I hear the crunching of wheels on the drive. From the big window in the hall I make out a station fly approaching the house. It must be Bryan coming home earlier than he expected, for the brougham was to have met him at six.

Poor Bryan! He has been dreadfully worried about money lately. I hope he will tell me everything presently, and then we can arrange matters upon a more satisfactory basis. We have evidently started our establishment beyond our income; but it is so simple, so easy to put it all right. Half the servants could work the house quite comfortably; half the horses would be enough for our use—my ponies can be sold and my hunters too; and we will give up all idea of going up to town this season. It is absurd to fret about money when there are such real, such terrible troubles in the world. Only I must have the bills paid; I would make any sacrifice rather than live in debt.

The fly lumbers slowly and heavily up to the front door.

I go forward to meet Bryan; and at the first glance I perceive that something of more importance than mere need for retrenchment is agitating him. His face is flushed, his eyes are wild, and his whole bearing disordered. He has a pile of silver in his shaking hand and is vainly endeavouring to count out the right change for the cabman.

‘Let Dixon pay, won’t you, Bryan?’ I suggest.

Dixon is gazing open-eyed and jaw-dropped at his master, and as I draw Bryan along the passage towards the library, I am not unconscious of the wink with which that domestic luminary favours his attendant satellites, nor of the upward motion of his hand as of one tilting a glass.

Dixon’s suspicions are wide of the mark however. Bryan has not been drinking. He is simply labouring under intense excitement.

'It's all up, Esmé!' he stammers, grasping my shoulder heavily as I close the door behind us. 'I shall have to make a bolt of it and show 'em a clean pair of heels. It's that confounded Yarborough's doing; if he hadn't stirred up the whole thing I should have tided it over—for another twelve months at least.'

'You will have to make a bolt of it!' I repeat, parrot-like.

'Yes, I must be off to-night by the six fifteen from Swindon and catch the mail leaving to-morrow morning for Buenos Ayres.'

'For Buenos Ayres—why?'

'The Argentine Republic, you see. There's no extradition treaty with the Argentine Republic, and I shall be all right there.'

I reach out my hand and touch my own ears and then the sleeve of Bryan's coat. Yes, we are both real. I am not dreaming; and I don't feel astonished in the very least. It seems as if it had all happened to me before.

Bryan is breathing heavily; his eyes never meet mine, but rove wildly around.

'You'll come with me,' he bursts out loudly, as I stand silent before him. 'Say you will come with me—quick! It has all been for you, Esmé. You *must* come with me.'

'Hush! Don't talk so loud. The servants will hear. Yes, I will come with you.'

Bryan catches me in his arms and presses me passionately to him.

'The worst is over,' he cries wildly, unheeding my caution. 'I can stand anything now. And you shall not want, my darling. There's plenty left to keep you from want.'

I draw gently away. The words do not occur to me to question Bryan; instead, I am reading the present in the light of the past. I have been wrapped up in myself or I should have known something was wrong long ago, should have had my suspicions ever since that morning at Cannes.

Bryan is walking about the room, talking continuously.

'Everything has come together. Yarborough bothering about his hundred thousand; Rhodes' solicitors dunning for the remaining payment for this place; my shares in the Saratanga copper mine gone to nothing, when I thought they would have pulled me through; my mother's trustees fussing about her investments—'

'Your mother!' I interrupt. 'Have you lost her money too?'

'Every penny of it. But don't you be afraid, darling; there's

enough in this' (tapping the tin box which is standing where I saw it yesterday) 'to set us going comfortably out there. And it is a lovely climate, they say; the flowers are wonderful.'

'When did these reverses begin, Bryan?'

'Eh? When did they begin? Oh—ah—well, I really don't know; while I was ill, I suppose. You remember I told you about my illness?'

'Yes; and when you got better you found everything was going wrong?'

'Had gone wrong,' corrects my husband; 'but I thought things would come round again if I left them alone. I made sure everything would shake down all right. You know the doctors told me not to worry—' and he looks at me with a gaze that is half-childish, half-cunning.

'What have we been living on since our marriage?'

'Well, we haven't paid for much. Half of Yarborough's money went in part payment for this place, and my mother's got mixed up in the muddle somehow; only a little of my brother's has been used lately for necessary calls.'

'Your brother's!'

'Yes, but not much of it. There was a tiresome trustee who would not let me sell the stock,' with a regretful accent.

I look at him curiously. How far is he sane? How far is he mad?

'But we are wasting time,' exclaims Bryan impatiently. 'We must be off from here soon—and all this will keep. I can tell you what you want to know later on. We must pack up ourselves; it won't do to let the servants suspect anything.'

Then, as I still sit motionless, he continues apologetically—

'I am very sorry to have to ask you to pack your things, Esmé. I know you have not been accustomed to it. And there is something else I am afraid you won't like. We cannot take Julie; it would not be safe. But you shall have another maid directly we get to Buenos Ayres.'

In the midst of my stunned horror I burst out laughing; it is so funny, so like Bryan, to consider the item of a maid in the midst of dishonour and disgrace.

'I mean it,' he cries eagerly. 'I am quite in earnest. I tell you I have picked up plenty from the wreck to keep you in perfect comfort.'

And again he lays his hand on the tin box.

‘In there?’

‘Yes.’

‘How much?’

‘About forty thousand in bonds, and enough cash to take us to Buenos Ayres and keep us for a few days until I can realise.’

‘You must leave the bonds behind, Bryan.’

‘Leave them behind! You don’t understand, my dear girl. I must take them with me in order to get the money out there. Now, you had better hurry and pack. I will come upstairs with you.’

‘You must only take enough of that money to pay for our passage, Bryan. The rest must go to your creditors.’

‘Nonsense!’

‘The forty thousand pounds must go to your creditors.’

‘And what are we to live upon?’

‘We must work.’

‘Work!’ exclaims my husband, with a loud laugh. ‘I wonder which would get through most work, you or I!’

Then, patting my shoulder and resorting to a familiar formula, he says—

‘Now, you leave me to manage the money, and run along and get your clothes together.’

‘Bryan, I will not go with you unless you leave that money behind.’

Then indeed my husband turns pale and eyes me with alarm.

‘You don’t know what you are talking about, Esmé. How could either you or I earn enough to keep us?’

‘I could scrub floors and you could break stones on the road.’

‘You are ranting,’ he says sulkily. ‘And as for the money, it would be a mere nothing divided amongst them all.’

‘It is no use arguing. I mean what I say. You must choose between the money and me.’

And as I speak a wild inconsistent hope springs up in my heart that he will give me a righteous excuse for remaining behind. But Bryan loves me better than money. He argues, he expostulates, he implores, he depicts our certain misery in vivid colours.

‘It is so perfectly ridiculous for you to talk of working at all in that hot climate. I hear that people spend the whole day in hammocks, drinking iced lemonade; I have been making inquiries about the place lately.’

But at last, as the time speeds on and he finds that I will not yield an inch, he begins to show signs of giving way rather than part from me.

'You don't know what you are insisting upon,' he whimpers, 'and you will be terribly sorry for it by-and-bye. But I won't go without you; and if we fool about here any longer we shan't get off at all.'

'Why won't you stay and face it out, Bryan? It is so cowardly to run away!'

'Good Lord!' exclaims my husband, with a start and looking apprehensively over his shoulder towards the door. 'You don't know what you are talking about. No, no!—you said you would come with me if I left those bonds behind.'

'So I will. Give me the box.'

'But the cash for our journey is in it.'

'Then take that out and leave the bonds.'

I stand over him as he fumbles among the papers. His hands are shaking so uncontrollably, and he betrays so strong an impulse to pocket indiscriminately, that I pull the box from him and sort out the bank-notes myself. They are all mixed up with the securities, with letters, with odds and ends of paper covered with figures and calculations, even with old invitations; amongst his treasures Bryan has hoarded a card for Lady Dromore's ball!

'There is the money,' I say at last. 'Will you take care of it, or shall I?'

'You had better. My head is aching so, I might forget where I had put it.'

I lock the tin box, place it in the big oak cabinet by the fireplace and lock that also. I do up the two keys in a safe packet, addressed to Sir Joseph Yarborough, and inclose one line of explanation; then I ring the bell and order a groom to ride at once to the post with the precious missive. It will be safe in Her Majesty's keeping.

Bryan meanwhile has gone upstairs, without even taking off the great-coat in which he has travelled. When I enter his dressing-room he is standing by the bed upon which he has spread out three white waistcoats.

'I can't find any more,' he says helplessly; 'and I shall want them so in that hot place. I ought to have a dozen.'

I sink suddenly into a chair, and a tight sensation grips my neck. Am I right to take his word for it that flight is necessary?

Ought I to leave home and country at his bidding? Is he capable of judging any business affairs—this creature who, in the midst of ruin and collapse, babbles of white waistcoats?

A horrid, choking, screaming sound comes tearing out of my throat without volition of my own. It astonishes me as much as it does Bryan, who drops his garments and gapes at me affrightedly.

‘Don’t! For God’s sake, don’t, Esmé!’ he implores. ‘It sounds as if you were going into hysterics.’

Hysterics! I am ashamed. I to give way to anything hysterical! I thought only uneducated people with ill-regulated, unbalanced minds were ever connected with hysterics.

I stamp my heel angrily on the floor, and regain control of myself.

‘I was only going to ask you if you are quite sure that you must run away like this, Bryan. Why can’t you go into the whole thing with your creditors? You may have more money left than you imagine.’

‘I am quite sure,’ he returns sullenly. ‘Why will you waste time talking about that now?’

‘Because I am not convinced that we are doing what is best,’ I say waveringly, more to myself than to him.

‘I *dare* not stay in the country,’ bursts out Bryan desperately. ‘Don’t you see that I should be arrested? A lot of trust-money is missing—and—and—I tell you, Esmé, we must get off by that train, or I shall never get off at all.’

Then hesitation vanishes. Where he goes I must go. In hideous mockery the words of the Moabite woman flit through my mind, ‘Whither thou goest, I will go.’

‘I hear that Buenos Ayres is a most sociable place,’ says Bryan, turning out his drawers pell mell on the floor; ‘plenty of gaiety always going on, and people very ready to make friends without asking inconvenient questions. How provoking! I ordered a lot of new ties the other day, thinking it as well to be prepared, and now I don’t know where that fellow has put them.’

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FLIGHT.

TAP, tap at my door, ten minutes later. 'May I come in?' cries Frances. 'Quick, unlock, open! I have such a piece of news for you!'

Strutting gaily in, eyes sparkling, cheeks glowing, mouth smiling, holding out the skirt of her habit in both hands, she makes a low curtsy at the reflection of herself in my long glass, while I re-lock the door behind her.

'Enter the future Mrs. Johnstone! Johnstone! Bah! How plebeian, isn't it? I have always laughed at double-barrelled names, but now I shall sigh for one. If I had only had some money we could have called ourselves Nugent-Johnstone, but it would be too ridiculous as it is.'

Then, taking off her hat, she goes close up to the mirror and examines herself critically.

'I *am* looking nice to-day. I don't wonder he came up to the scratch. How do you think he did it, Esmé? He actually made a speech—a regular oration. I can tell you every word. It was just outside Charity Wood, and the hounds were drawing—What's this? Where are you going?'

For, turning away from the mirror, she knocks against the small portmanteau which I have been hurriedly filling with necessities. I open my lips to answer her; but the words will not come.

'What has happened? How ghastly you look, Esmé! Have you quarrelled with Bryan? Ah! I see—I know! You are going off to Allan Vaudrey! Thank Heaven I came back in time to stop you!'

Again that tight grip at my throat; but I know what it means now; I must not begin to laugh. Only, what a funny mistake Frances has made! No, I am certainly not going to Allan; I am going away from him, from home, from self-respect—to a place where the people never ask inconvenient questions! Ha! ha!

'For, stop you I will,' goes on Frances; 'even if I tell Bryan——' She pauses; for Bryan himself appears at the door between our rooms, bearing triumphantly aloft a whole pile of white waistcoats.

'I have found them!' he cries. 'Such a comfort, isn't it?'

One can't enjoy anything if one's clothes are too heavy. Oh! Frances!'

And he drops his bundle all in a heap.

'So you are packing too,' she says slowly, eyeing us, first one and then the other. 'You might tell me where you are going, I think. It would be only polite.'

'You tell her, please, Bryan,' I say shakingly.

'We are going *away*,' begins Bryan, with great dignity and equal vagueness; 'and we are sorry not to be able to ask you to come with us, Frances.' Then, picking up his scattered articles of attire, he adds hurriedly, 'The fact is, I have had considerable losses, and it is just as well you should not know where we are going——' and vanishes precipitately.

Frances is never one of those provoking people who require everything to be explained at full length; a wink is always as good as a nod to her, and with half a dozen quick questions she has probed the whole situation, and knows as much as I.

'You must not go with him,' she declares in a low, hurried whisper; 'you must stay behind and brave it out. Everyone will believe that you were kept in the dark about his affairs, and no one will blame you.' Then, throwing herself on her knees before me, she flings her arms round my waist. 'Poor darling Esmé! I am so sorry for you!'

In the midst of the overwhelming despair that is crushing me my sister's touch of affection comes like a ray of comfort. I shall always be glad that she spoke to me with such prompt love, and I shall like to remember that she wanted to keep me with her. Dear, pretty, bright Frances! I may never see her again.

Yet as I bend over her and, dry-eyed, kiss her upturned face, I know too well that I have only to touch one chord to make her relax all opposition to my flight.

'I must go with him, my pet; and it is better for you that I should. People will be kinder to you if you are left quite alone and not associated in any way with my disgraced name.'

Even as I speak, her arm drops from me, and her ready brain begins mapping out her plans.

'I can stay with Mrs. Stuart,' she reflects aloud; 'and I don't think Major Johnstone will throw me over. How thrice providential that he proposed to-day!'

'Esmé!' calls out Bryan from the next room, 'come here, and give me your opinion about these boots.'

From the depths of some recess he has unearthed about twenty pairs of boots of various sorts and descriptions, and has ranged them neatly in a row down the centre of the room, from window to door.

'I shan't want these, shall I?' he asks doubtfully, touching a pair of new top-boots. 'I don't think there is any hunting out there. I have never heard of any foxes at the River Plate, have you?'

His face is flushed, his eyes wandering, his hair disordered; with twitching hands he plucks at the front of his coat, and nervously opens his watch every two minutes. The three large portmanteaus he has selected to carry his wardrobe still gape in reproachful emptiness.

To catch the express at Swindon we must leave the house in half an hour. Bryan will never be ready if left to his own devices. I must pack for him, and Frances for me.

So, on my knees before the first and largest of the leathern trio, I endeavour to reconcile space and time with Bryan's determination to be comfortable at Buenos Ayres. He clings desperately to the various knickknacks which embellish his dressing-room, and is specially attached to the fittings of his toilet-table.

'You know it is all very well for you to talk, my dear,' he remarks, waving a little silver hand-glass as he stands over me; 'but one can't get these things out there for love or money. And you will wish then you had shown a little more foresight.'

'How dare you speak to her like that?' breaks out Frances angrily. She has quickly and deftly finished my packing, and now stands watching my struggles with Bryan. 'Just look what you have brought her to! Poor, beautiful darling! Oh, what a fatal mistake we made when she married you!'

Bryan turns furiously upon her—he has always hated Frances; but in a moment I am between them.

'Come and help me put on my cloak, Frances; and, Bryan, you ring for the servants to take the luggage down. It is ready now.'

In two minutes my travelling things are huddled on, and Frances ties a thick veil over my quivering, tell-tale face. As we open the bedroom door we tumble against Julie and one of the housemaids, who are doubled outside with ears suspiciously near the keyhole.

'Julie, go and tidy up in there,' says Frances; calmly. 'Madame has heard most distressing news; a dear relative is dying, and Madame goes to watch beside her sick bed.'

'Ah! Ah! C'est comme ça?' ejaculates Julie, with polite incredulity, but marches into my room nimbly enough. Her time

for looting will be short. Frances will hurry upstairs the moment we drive off, and then Julie will have to play second fiddle.

The brougham is waiting, and my husband stands by the door.

Fear is not at any time an ennobling or beautifying emotion; and to-day it has chased all vestiges of respectability from Bryan's person. He cowers beneath Dixon's fixed stare, and timidly inspects his muddy boots, turning his foot with unconscious mechanism first to one side and then to the other. Unwashed from the accumulated smuts of London and the train, his greasy skin dirtily shining, his clothes all awry, every line of his fat limp body betraying the nervous tremor which is shaking him, the whole aspect of the creature proclaims guilty cowardice, contemptible want of pluck.

Suddenly and horribly my heart quails within me. I cannot go with that man. I cannot follow him to be an outcast on the face of the earth.

I throw my arms around my sister and hold her tightly to me. In that desperate embrace I cling not to Frances individually, but to the old life of which she is the momentary embodiment.

'I cannot, Frances! I cannot!' I gasp breathlessly in her ear.

But though she responds warmly to my kisses and answers my tears with her own, her fingers unloose my convulsive clasp, and her hand guides me gently to the carriage. Frances is sorry for me; but I should be decidedly in her way if I remained behind.

She need not have been afraid. My will is fixed, though for one moment my strength failed me.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DEAD.

TRAVELLING across country by a local train, we have caught the express at Swindon, and are now flying rapidly through the high hedgerows and banked-up ditches of placid, garden-like Berkshire.

Exhilarated by the motion and fortified by the sense of near escape from his troubles, Bryan is beginning to pluck up heart again. In the far corner of the carriage to which he has retreated he has made himself as comfortable as circumstances will permit; his feet rest on a handbag, a fur rug is wrapped around his knees,

and as he polishes the silver mountings of his travelling flask with a very dirty pocket-handkerchief he even feels himself equal to whistling snatches of 'The Mikado' under his breath.

I am feigning sleep in order to get a little quiet. After attending carefully to my creature comforts, Bryan became extremely conversational, and began to amuse himself with wondering what our quondam neighbours will say when they hear of our flight.

'Mrs. Westby will declare that she feared it all along,' I have assured him wearily. 'Do you mind my resting now, dear? I think I shall go to sleep.'

So, with closed eyelids, I am left to my own reflections.

They say that to a drowning man a vision of his whole life swiftly appears, that events long forgotten rise up and flash across his memory. So to me, in the crisis of my fate, a panorama spreads itself out in which I see myself in various guises, from toddling, happy childhood to the uneasy misery of my married life.

I am back again in spirit at Billington, and Frances and I are wandering about the beautiful gardens, or rambling through the fine great rooms full of time-honoured treasures, so different in their ancient stateliness from the modern glories of Milbourne. How we used to talk about our future husbands even when we were little chits in the nursery! Frances always declared that she would marry a duke, and from her tenderest years had well-defined notions as to which of his numerous places she would more particularly make her own. The lovers who existed in my imagination were legion, and varied in nationality, rank, and complexion. I have constructed romances, with myself for heroine, in which an emperor knelt before me, or in which I tramped barefoot through African deserts with a dusky Arab who had carried me off on his long-tailed steed—according to the last book approved by my fancy.

Then, as we grew older and went out in the world, how its pleasures took hold of us! How quickly we picked up its jargon and appraised everything at its valuation! How highly we estimated our charms, and how lofty was the standard of our deserts!

I remember when Allan Vaudrey first came about me that I flirted with him and talked to him with a decided sense of condescension.

Fool that I was! Poor motherless, misguided fool who did

not even know the A B C of my own heart. Of all I have left behind me at Milbourne, I most regret that little pencil-case of Allan's, thrown sturdily into the big pond in an access of comba-tant virtue. I wish I had kept it. If I had only known that I was soon to be torn away from all possible chance of seeing him again, I might have permitted myself to treasure that one little trifle that had belonged to him, that his hands had touched. He kissed my lips once—and furtively I put up my fingers and stroke them tenderly—but pah! how often has Bryan kissed them since?

Now I shall be as one dead to Allan. I used to think a week ago—yesterday even—that my life was broken, that I should never look in his eyes and hear his voice again. But I know now, in the lurid light of this supreme despair, that I was harbouring a lurking hope that he would come back to me, would yield to my conditions and brighten my days with his friendship.

Where I am going he can never follow me. Will he even know in what part of the weary world I am hiding my disgraced head, I wonder? Will our destination ever be mentioned in polite society? I suppose the detectives and all the people whom we have robbed will find out what uncivilised region is harbouring us from the grip of a just law, but our whilom friends and acquaintance will scarcely care to pursue their inquiries beyond the one word 'absconded.'

'By Jove! I have just remembered your picture!' exclaims Bryan. 'Blakely promised to send it home yesterday. I am sorry to leave it behind. Do you remember how I insisted upon the canvas being smaller than he wished? I had my reasons, you see. I always meant to take it with us.'

And he pauses for approbation of his forethought.

'How we are flying along!' he continues, as I make no reply. 'We must be going eighty miles an hour. They were late at Swindon, so I suppose we are making it up now.'

'Oh God! Thy hand is heavy upon me. Have mercy, and take away my life. I can endure no more. Surely the punishment for my offence is great. Have I not suffered enough to earn the repose of the grave? Have pity, and let me die!'

So I pray in utter desolation. Who would live without hope? And what hope can I have, doomed to wander an exile among the scum of the earth, my husband my sole companion—a thief! Without remorse for the past or anxiety for the future, he sits

there chuckling in childish short-sighted glee at his present brief success.

I believe God will hear my prayer. I do not think I shall live long. I have been feeling so weak lately; and in a hot climate, with poor lodging and coarse fare, I shall surely——

Crash! A hideous, grinding, tearing noise.

The train is rocking, swaying wildly to and fro. I am thrown against the opposite seat, backwards, forwards.

Good Heaven! This is some frightful accident! We are still rushing madly on, but with what horrible violence we are shaken, rattled, tossed about! Oh! if it would only come quickly!—the awful smash which must come! This agony is so long—so long!

The air is full of fearful noises—of wood and iron cracking, breaking, and above all the terrified shrieks of human voices. Bryan is screaming. For myself I know not if I cry out, but my eyeballs are straining in my head.

A shock more violent yet, which seems to lift me high in the air—and then, for one brief moment, stillness.

I am roused by steam rushing over me. I must get out of this horrible prison before I am scalded to death. Quick! Out of the window up there! The carriage is turned on one side and the window high above me; but I clamber over the arms of the seats. I push myself through the opening without waiting to clear away the broken glass; I jump on to a bank of gorse, and tear my way up the high embankment—up, up to the very top, right away from that awful train, that blinding steam.

Then I fall upon my knees and pant aloud, 'Thank God, thank God!' full of gratitude in that it has pleased Him to spare the life that five short minutes ago I was beseeching Him to take.

Bryan has not followed me.

I rise from my knees and approach the edge of the embankment. What is this streaming wet upon my face and trickling down my neck? I put up my hand and withdraw it—red with blood. There, all down the front of my cloak, is a stream of blood. Ugh! I am bespattered with it all over. I must have cut myself getting through the broken window, for my limbs are safe and sound. Wildly I run my fingers over my head, my face, my neck. No, I can find no cut. My skin is scratched and torn indeed with the thorny gorse, but there is nothing on

me to account for this hideous stream of blood. Why is Bryan not getting out of that fearful carriage? I must go and help him.

Trembling I crawl down through the gorse again.

The train is lying wrecked before me. Groups of people stand, sit, lie about, some screaming, some palely silent.

There is no one around our carriage. I remember that we came high up in the train near the engine so as to get a compartment to ourselves. The guard passes me running along.

'Stop!' I cry, full of shuddering terror. 'Stop! I want you to help me.'

'I cannot,' he replies, not slackening his speed. 'My own arm is broken, but I must stop the down express.'

Will no one come? There is a man down there, walking slowly towards me, but I cannot wait for him. Bryan may be wanting help.

Shaking violently in every limb I climb with difficulty up the carriage and on to its overturned side. I look through the broken window. In the far corner, a shapeless crumpled up heap, Bryan is lying perfectly still.

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Nothing can be done for him, they tell me. He is dead!

CHAPTER XL.

THE FUTURE.

THEY take me to a farmhouse close by, and there the farmer's wife undresses me and puts me to bed, in spite of my angry remonstrance that I am quite well. I think she was right, though, for I remember that when she left me unsupported for a moment my head felt so strangely heavy that I could not hold it up, and my feet slipped away from me.

Once having got me flat the poor woman is at an end of her resources, and in helpless alarm gazes at me as I cry out, and moan, and shiver. It is apparently a relief to her when I exclaim crossly that my feet are like ice and my head like fire. These physical woes she can understand and alleviate.

It is not till far on in the night that I take any notice of her

inquiries for the address of my friends that she may communicate with them.

At first, nothing better has occurred to me than to turn my head fretfully away ; but roused at last by her repeated declarations that I should feel quite well and happy if only ' my mamma, or my sisters, were to come and cheer me up,' I start wildly in the bed, and gripping her arm, scream out—

' There is no one who would come to me—no one. You don't understand. I am disgraced and quite alone ! '

Whereupon she lifts up my left hand with an anxious frown, and is obviously reassured by the sight of my wedding-ring.

' I am very sorry to give you all this trouble,' I sob apologetically, ' and I will try to lie quiet now. But there is no one to whom you can write.'

Next day the doctor comes, evidently upon her anxious representation that there must be something wrong with me internally, and makes an exhaustive examination of my wretched body.

He finds nothing amiss, and departs without even leaving a prescription, much to poor Mrs. Silwood's disappointment.

' I think if he had given you one of them nice fizzing draughts, it would have done you good,' she says regretfully, with the faith of her class in a medicine bottle.

Then she makes me get up and lie upon the sofa in her little sitting-room ; and the doctor having guaranteed the soundness of my various limbs and organs, sees no good reason why her curiosity should not be satisfied, and my mind exercised by a full, true, and particular account of the accident.

' We have always sworn that Flying Dutchman would run off the lines some day,' she begins contentedly ; ' and to think it should have happened at our own door ! And what was the very last words your poor good man said to you, my dear ? '

The horrible nightmare-like day is over at last, and as twilight closes in I lie in an exhausted and fitful slumber. Even in my sleep I retain consciousness of my troubles, and dream restlessly that Bryan's mother has no food in the house, and that my dress-maker keeps asking her for money. Then Jacquetta gets mixed up in it somehow ; she must have come to see Bryan's mother, I suppose.

' I think you are quite right,' she is saying. ' A wretched fly like that would shake her to pieces.'

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' I think you are quite right,' she is saying. ' A wretched fly like that would shake her to pieces.'

Why, that *is* Jacquetta's voice! I am not dreaming. In another moment I am folded in her comfortable embrace.

'Oh! You don't know all, Jacquetta,' I cry loudly, pushing her away. 'You don't know all, or you would never have come to me.'

'Yes, I do, dear. Hush! It is not your fault,' she answers, soothingly, as one would speak to a child. 'I have come to take you home with me. And who do you think I travelled with from Paddington? Why, Sir Allan Vaudrey! He saw the account of the accident in the morning papers, and came straight down from the North. No, you must not try to sit up, darling. Lie still, and I will tell you what I am going to do. I am going to stay here with you to-night, and then to-morrow morning we will go home together, you and I. Sir Allan has gone away to order a comfortable carriage for you.'

Winter has given place to summer, and six months have drawn their veil over the troubles and horrors of that fearful January day.

I am lying in a hammock in Sir Joseph Yarborough's garden, a hammock slung by a cunning hand under the shadiest of copper beeches. The air is scented with the thousand odours of July; the roses are blooming around me in many-tinted profusion; the bees are humming their industrious refrain—are they making love, I wonder, or only commenting on the qualities of the wall fruit?

At my feet Jacquetta's Dachs is curled in dreamless slumber—Dachs is devoted to a hammock; in my lap lie half-a-dozen flowers and a French novel; over my head a Japanese parasol unnecessarily supplements the shade of the beech's lovely red leaves—and by my side sits Allan Vaudrey.

'It is so absurd to talk of the customs of society,' he is grumbling. 'We might as well be married now as in ten years' time. You and I are not going to lead conventional lives.'

'What a recklessly profligate statement!'

'Well, I stick to it. There is nothing conventional about the whole thing.'

'It certainly is not the custom of society for a man to pay the debts of his wife's first husband,' I reflect gravely.

'You needn't hark back to that again,' interrupts Allan. 'You make me feel sometimes as if I had bought you.'

'So you have,' I rejoin placidly. 'You have bought me with hard cash paid down on the nail to Bryan's creditors. I never would have married you or any other man if all those poor people had been swindled out of their money.'

'Well, now that all those poor people, as you call them, are satisfied, you might marry me at once.'

'I should like a long, *long* time first,' I rejoin absently, dropping my parasol and staring up into the leafy screen above me.

'You are not very polite,' says Allan in a mortified voice.

'It seems as if it would take me years and years to get over the deadly shame,' I continue.

'Nonsense! There's no shame about it! People only know that there were money difficulties, and as all claims have been paid in full no one can say a word.'

'I didn't mean that. I was not thinking of money just then. I meant the shame of having been Bryan's wife. Not Heaven itself can change that now, and I can never forget it.'

'Yes, you will forget it in time,' says Allan gently. 'Look what even six months have done for you. You are picking up wonderfully. You are getting quite plump,' lifting my hand before my eyes.

'Oh! I am much better than I was of course. Let go my hand, Allan, quick!—there's a gardener coming round the corner.'

'There is one thing I have fully made up my mind about,' declares Allan presently. 'That odious sister of yours shall never set foot inside our doors. You don't want to see her, do you?'

'It doesn't matter much whether I want to see her or not,' I reply with a shamefaced laugh. 'As Major Johnstone only carried out the engagement on condition that she held no communication with me, and as I was not even asked to the wedding, he is not likely to allow her to stay with me. The contact would be too contaminating.'

'Impertinent brute!' roars Allan angrily. 'He will have some new lights upon Frances' character before long if I am not much mistaken. Serve him right too.'

'I dare say he will relent in his severity when I am really and truly whitewashed by marrying you, but in the meanwhile he thinks it is better to be cautious.'

'Let me tell you, I will never have her inside our doors! There!'

'Is this the cloven hoof of authority?' I ask lightly, raising

myself on my elbow to look at him. 'You don't cherish any old-fashioned notions about wifely obedience, do you? Because I haven't the remotest intention of obeying you—ever—about anything!'

'Well, that's fair notice beforehand.'

'You see,' I continue explanatorily, 'I always used to be very polite and obedient to Bryan because I didn't care for him—poor fellow! But I intend to do *exactly* as I like with you.'

'You are certainly getting better,' says Allan. 'That sounds almost like your old self again!'

THE END.

